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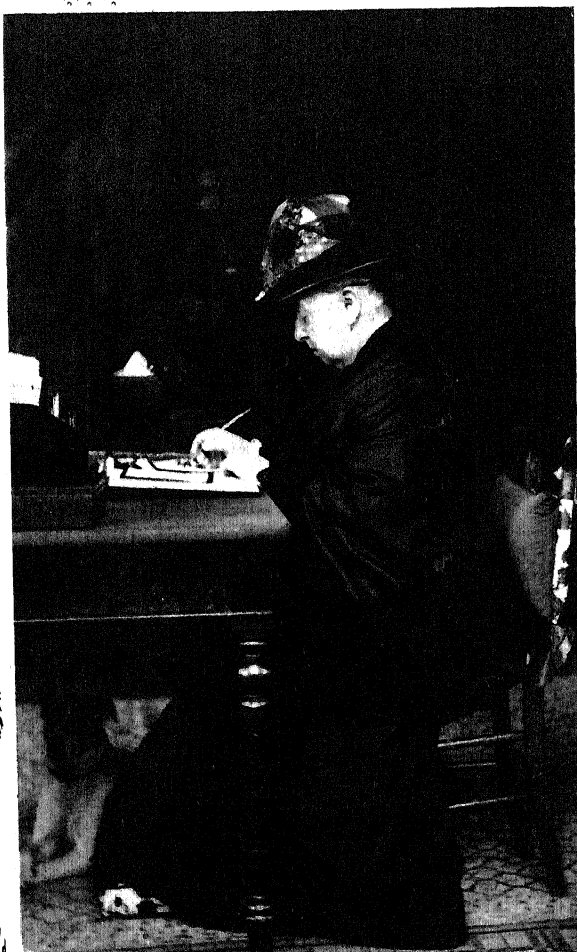
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**VICTORIA  
ROYAL**



*From a photograph by Hughes and Mullins, August, 1887*

Queen Victoria





# VICTORIA ROYAL

THE  
FLOWERING OF  
A STYLE

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RITA  
WELLMAN

1939

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS · NEW YORK  
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*FOR*  
*MY SISTERS*  
*RUTH*  
*AND CHARLTON*





## INTRODUCTION

*"We imagine the Victorians for ever playing croquet without ever losing their tempers."*

ROGER FRY

TO MANY of us the Victorians are completely incomprehensible, as foreign to our way of thinking as the dog-eating Igaroti—a race apart. They represent to us a long gap in civilization, an abyss that separates the enlightened eighteenth century and ourselves. Those whose childhood memories include the Victorian décor shudder at the very thought of it; and even those of us who take our own present-day good taste as a matter of course, have a twinge of spiritual uneasiness, almost like guilt, when Victorian taste is mentioned. We have successfully rid ourselves of the century that fathered our own; we slammed the door very hard on it and turned the key and that, we hoped, was the end of it.

Yet perversely, or in the interest of the arts—or is it snob-bishness?—some of us must sneak up to that locked door, turn the old key—a highly ornate one, of course—and venture in. At first the musty air is overpowering; here in the dark and gloom ottoman and what-not crouch like Disney monsters ready to cast some evil spell upon us, dooming us never again to see the light of day.

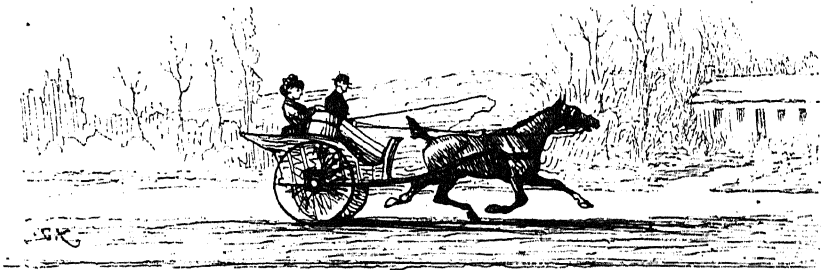
But gradually the gloom lifts a little. We look about us. The ottoman subsides into its proper form. The what-not, that had

## INTRODUCTION

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extended such threatening arms towards us, has settled into an attitude of hieratic dignity, holding to itself with a kind of maternal pride its collection of fantastic bric-a-brac.

Some of this is not bad, we think as we stumble about, not bad at all. Quaint, and somehow appealing. Some of it is really, yes, really good. It is still musty in here, and a little too dark to see clearly. Yet it all does not seem so horrible now. And what is that over there? Surely we have seen that before; we know it well, almost too well. But here, in this place, behind the locked door! But there is no use to deny it. It is as plain as the nose on our face. In fact, it *is* our face.



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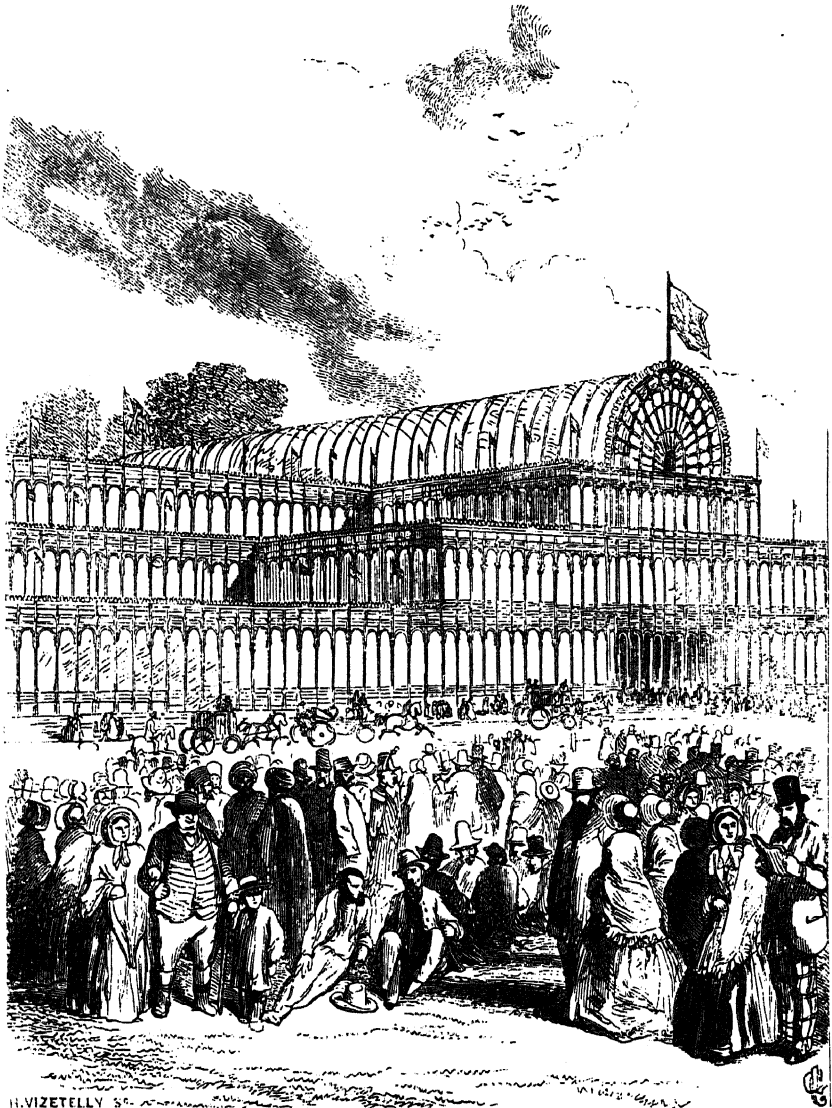
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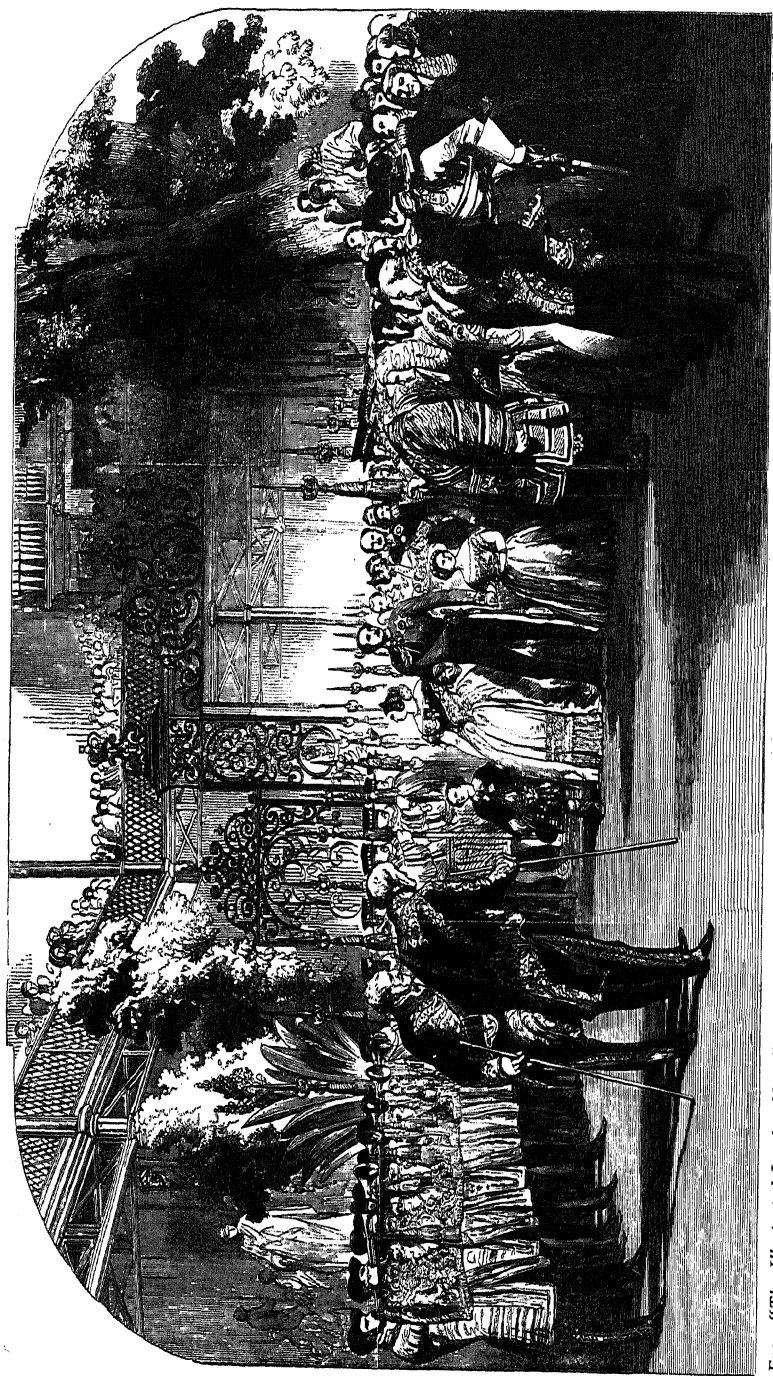
PART ONE

# ENGLAND



H. VIZETELLY SC. - J. GILBERT DEL.  
*From a drawing by John Gilbert*

The Crystal Palace, Hyde Park, 1851



From "The Illustrated London News" of May 10, 1851

Opening of the Great Exhibition—Entrance of Her Majesty and His Royal Highness, Prince Albert

## CROWNED HEADS AND THE BAROQUE

DECORATIVE periods of the past have been painstakingly defined and labeled by the experts; each, in spite of the humanly intractable elements that make things difficult for specialists in all fields, has been put into its proper niche and given its particular name by which most experts are willing to call it—until one of them thinks up a new label. All styles have been carefully charted—all except the Victorian; that is, the decorative period from 1837 to 1901. We sometimes, it is true, divide the long years of the Queen's reign into Early Victorian, Mid-Victorian (which popularly is often made to cover the whole period), and The Nineties, or *fin de siècle*. There are also Thomas Beer's "The Mauve Decade," and Lewis Mumford's "The Brown Decades," and, among other tags, there is the brilliant title of Roger Fry's essay on early Victorian decoration—"The Ottoman and the Whatnot." But in spite of these aids towards subdividing the epoch into appropriately named periods, we persist in lumping the various phases of its decorative arts together under the name "Victorian."

This, when we come to think of it, is quite fitting. It is a wonderful name, Victoria. It has in it the classical sound, the portentousness, the self-complacency, the dignity maintained in spite of everything, that typifies so much of the period.

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Yet Victoria herself had very little to do with the setting of styles. She was no Madame de Pompadour—in this or in anything else. The fashionable cabinet makers did not consult her; the textile designers did not know her favorite color and perpetuate it in designs to do her honor. It is doubtful if any designer ever sat up all night working over his plans and then, when day came, drew the air into his cramped lungs and said, "This ought to please the Queen."

Victoria, who could be positive enough in her dislikes and disapproval, but who was usually hesitant when it was a question of taking the initiative—little is known of her as an innovator, in decorative or political matters—seems to have taken the artistic world pretty much as she found it. As long as a thing was "proper-looking," one might imagine, it was all right for her taste.

The Prince Consort's preoccupation with decorative matters undoubtedly influenced her, but her reaction seems to have been mainly on the passive side. Albert designed it, Albert approved of it, Albert suggested it—it must be right, as he could do no wrong. Perhaps her own taste was expressed by a too ample agreement with her acknowledged leader. When Balmoral was built, it was Albert's idea that this Highland castle should be a glorification of the Scottish tartan. But it may well have been Victoria's delighted acceptance of this novel idea that led to the excessive use of the tartan in this castle where walls, floors, and furniture were tartan-covered, and tartan curtains hung at the windows and doors, all especially designed by the Queen and the Prince Consort. The effect when the Royal Family appeared in these rooms, the

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family itself decked in tartans, is beyond the imagination of even a Lewis Carroll. This was the kind of emphasis, like the underscoring of words in the famous letters and journals, that Victoria gave to everything, like a careful needlewoman who ties her thread with a tight little knot, a click of her thimble and a determined nod of the head, as if to say, "*So!*"

But the designing of tartans, even the idea of filling a Scottish castle with tartans, cannot be accepted as an important decorative event from which a style would emerge. Victoria and Albert will not help us in our effort to isolate the germ of Victorianism.

Like most trends, it probably came about as a revolt against something else. Kings had become unfashionable when Victoria was new to the throne. And yet, since royalty was determined to keep its place in the scheme of things, it must do so by acting "*le bon père de famille*," like Louis-Philippe, or by making the palace the true ideal of the home, as in the case of Victoria.

And in this change from the established order of the eighteenth century, when the pattern of royalty was not expected to have any relation to the pattern of the commoner, the Baroque stepped in, the Baroque which is the unaccountable Ariel-spirit among the styles. Repressed and made to do service in periods of stability and overpowering leadership in creation, it has its release in times of uncertainty and change. It sprang into fresh life in the early forties and set its capricious touch upon forms that were basically fashioned in great solemnity to meet with a growing ideal of respectability.

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The early Victorian style, with its combination of heavy decorum and a Baroque defiance of logic, its heavily carved dark woods, its arbitrary curves, and its characteristic innovation, the ring-back chair, can be said to be a French creation inspired by an admiration of English conservatism. The décor created for that determined democrat, the Bourbon Louis-Philippe, would come to England as a new style which had features of double attraction for the England of Victoria: it had not only the cachet of Paris on it, but it had about it a wholly acceptable "English look." It paid tribute to the fashionable snobbishness of both nations; it was, in fact, a *style Anglais*.

When Victoria came to the throne Georgian England had by no means disappeared. In London, a few Tories with red, puffy faces and gouty legs would still be carried about in their chairs, with link boys in attendance. Georgian buildings still wore their look of inevitability, as confident of their enduring place as the cliffs of Dover.

Conversation was still elegant, and full of an established convention of ribaldry. Victoria, herself, in the first flush of freedom and power, was a Georgian miss who knew how to steer her way with ease in a fashionable world where the rules were made for the sake of masculine freedom and convenience—as Georgian furniture had been made.

With the exception of some of the lighter, very expensive pieces made for special purposes and in limited numbers, the Georgian furniture was all masculine. It had the weight, the solidity, the dark yet rich coloring which agrees with the mas-

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culine nature. In his cups a Georgian could fling himself about if he chose without causing damage to his surroundings; the things about him were firmly put together with unobtrusive curves and angles; they were liberal in their shapes and there were never too many of them about. Chairs were comfortably supporting without being too relaxing; cupboards opened for him without protest, or effort on his part; drawers pulled out at the right heights, easily and quietly. Nothing creaked under his weight, or jabbed him in the wrong places, or made him feel in an alien world of the theatre, the boudoir or the Continent. This was a world of order and balance which would restore him to his proper atmosphere without setting him an ideal too lofty to live up to. The legs of his chairs and tables were reminders of the animals he liked to hunt, or to have about him; in some cases they grasped a ball as if it were a prey, and in the virile strength and tension of these furniture carvings he could find an almost physical affirmation of the importance of his own being.

The well-proportioned rectilinear form and the forceful curve, the restrained motifs of shell, lion, dog, eagle and shield, like the old Porto and the full-bodied coffee house joke, were an essential part of the Georgian background. Into this background Victoria stepped with her demure walk which carried her gracefully and lightly among the solid shapes; here, she was like a new wife come to the house of her husband—she might like and even respect what she sees but she knows in the back of her mind that inevitably things will not remain as they are now that she has come to take charge.

George III, could he have returned, would have found his

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own London in Victoria's London; but he would also have found another London, one that he had never dreamt of, and occupied by people he knew nothing about. They had been coming in while he was still alive, although he did not know it—they came so furtively and in such small numbers and took up so little room. Others had followed them until by Victoria's time they had grown into a small army, the army of unclassifiabes created by the machine. The old city could not change itself overnight to make room for them all. They crowded in where they could, several families of them in a one-room "slum."

They stank, and the more of them that came pouring into the city the more they and it stank. In medieval times a high smell lingered about any large habitation; kings cleared out their castles from time to time, taking everything away with them and leaving the place bare in order "to sweeten same." But in the London of the forties there were thousands who could not leave; if water was turned on for only short periods during the day, and if sanitary conditions were hopeless, they must stay where they were just the same. The chaste and rococo flower of Victorianism bloomed above the unspeakable filth of old sewers, barrel drains and overflowing cesspools, but bloom it did, and triumphantly.

The smell of the city could, of course, become so familiar that it might go almost unnoticed, like the smell of gasoline in the streets of a modern city that offends only on certain days. It could even become a kind of affectionate civic joke, and when on sultry days the fumes from under Westminster Abbey, or even Buckingham Palace itself, became particularly



offensive, comment on the fact would make a bond of sympathy between acquaintances on the street. "His Nibs is rather high today," one of them might say, and both would feel better about things in general.



From "The Illustrated London News" of 1851

### Rotten Row, Hyde Park

The plan to hold the International Exhibition in Hyde Park was objected to by the aristocrats who feared the contaminating presence of the people so close to their exclusive Rotten Row

But even if the bad odors in the Victorian cities could be passed off with a joke, there were other things that could not. Georgian life, lingering on in Belgravia, might well contribute its knowledge of good talk and good living to the world already beginning to feel the pressure of Victorian prudery; but in meaner circles Georgian sports of bull-baiting

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and bear-baiting were still flourishing, and there were still public hangings to keep alive the lusty cruelty of "Merrie England." And there were the strangers; every large town had its divisions of the machine-made army of skilled and unskilled workers, with no place to put them and no knowledge of how to manage them.

The consciousness of these new hordes, and the strange things that might be bred among them, would cause the doors to be locked more securely than in the old days, the sedate look of hospitality to disappear from the façades, and barriers of stuffs to be hung against the windows to separate the home from what went on outside it. Once a place becomes closed in upon itself it is only natural that it should become cluttered up with all sorts of things, the trivial and the important, all locked in together as part of the atmosphere of refuge and apartness.

Ideas, ideas of all kinds as well as the decorative, found their way into the early Victorian home; place was made for them and they stuck; gradually they became a part of the atmosphere, losing their original force and meaning, taking on the coloring shared by everything else in the general isolation from the outside world. The "vulgarity" of everyday life was the enemy which the home barred out. A determined domesticity, conjugal fidelity, maiden virtue were the supports that upheld the home. Nature, too, a nature thought of as having nothing to do with human nature, was taken in and made to feel at home.

The Victorian home was the downfall of the lusty Georgian



*Courtesy of Andrew Usher & Co., Edinburgh*

### The Derby Day at Epsom, 1857

From a section of the painting by W. P. Frith, R. A., now in the Tate Gallery. Frith's "Derby Day" was one of the first Victorian paintings to approach a realistic portrayal of a familiar scene. It created such a sensation at the Royal Academy it had to be roped off from the great crowds of people, most of whom had never seen an oil painting before

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who had ordered everything for his own pleasure. The curves that begin to dominate decoration are no longer the strong Georgian curves as of animals' bodies, nor are they the rhythmic, organic curves of eighteenth-century French decoration. These are dressmaker's ruffles and hairdresser's ringlets transferred to wood and marble and textiles. The Victorian woman is on her way upward to her pedestal from which she will dominate for years to come. She begins by exaggerating her feminine qualities. Where a few yards did for the farthingale the Victorian crinoline must take over ten yards. Way must be made for her wherever she goes. The fact that the Victorian woman was allowed to take up so much room when life was beginning to become more and more cramped has never been accounted for. Madame de Pompadour wore very full skirts herself, but with her eye for harmony she saw to it that chairs were made wide enough to accommodate the extra yards that swirled about her, and no interior that reflected her taste was arranged in such a way that graceful movements of women were impossible.

Victorian sentiment is born in the rarefied atmosphere in which the crinoline acts as a kind of ideal chaperone for the sublimated woman. Strong feeling and rich impulses, as well as frankness in speech, are no longer permissible in the crinoline-ruled world. Mottoes and apothegms become popular. In the Victorian decorative scheme, down to the end of the century, mottoes are conspicuous, beginning in wool-work and ending in carved wood and stained glass.

## GOD BLESS DEAREST ALBERT

1870

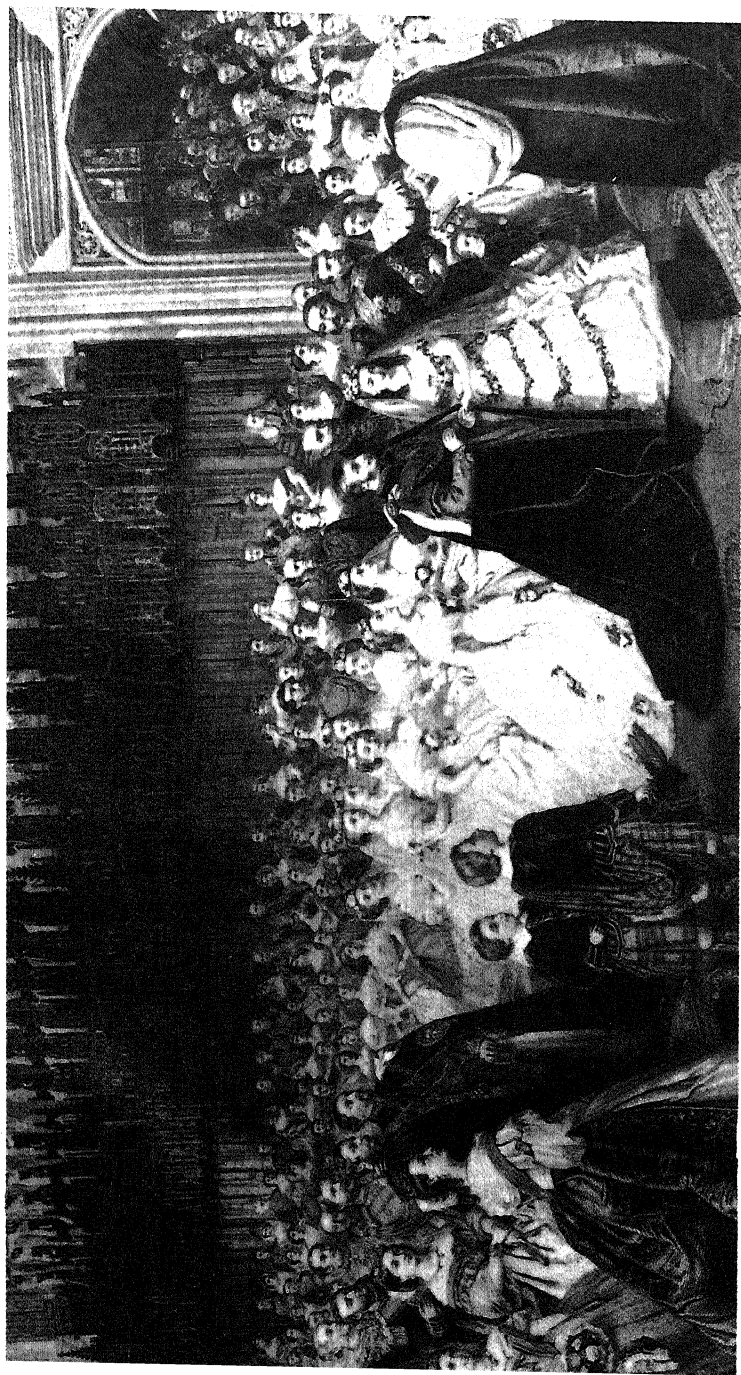
PRINCE ALBERT had had a careful German education and was thoroughly trained in the civilized arts. His interest in music, painting, and design was more than the superficial interest of the cultured European whose caste demands that he at least know enough about the arts to be able to talk about them as a spice to polite conversation. Albert wrote many musical compositions. He played the piano, and the organ as well—it was his favorite instrument—and in spite of the naturally flattering opinion of certain prejudiced contemporaries, it is possible to believe that he played both with more than ordinary skill. He and Victoria made frequent visits to art exhibitions, and they were both amateur artists. On several occasions they collaborated on neat little etchings. (Victoria's amazing energy would not let her enjoy a beautiful scene in humble contemplation; she must get out her sketch book, or her water colors, and express her feelings about it. In the same need for identifying herself with what pleased her she made sketches of all the Dandie Dinmonts, cairns, setters, terriers, mastiffs, and pug dogs that passed through her heart during her long life; these are careful, amateur drawings, but many of them are full of charm and unmistakable tenderness for the subjects.)

Albert not only took a deep interest in the fine arts—thanks

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to his zeal the Royal collection of paintings at Buckingham Palace contains a fine group of Flemish and Italian Primitives, including an exceedingly rare Gentile da Fabriano—but he was a constant student of technical details in the arts of manufacture. No process or method or knack was too complicated or too trivial for him to investigate. He would go anywhere in order to see for himself how British artisans and craftsmen went about their work, and would stand patiently asking them questions. Sir Charles Eastlake, the painter, told of his expressing his admiration for British skill in all branches of the industrial arts “til the varnishing of carriages.” He encouraged industrial design by offering prizes, and was obsessed with the idea of improving the Royal Schools of Design. He liked “talking art” with artists. “All works of poetry and art are most tender plants,” he wrote, “which will thrive only in an atmosphere of kindness—kindness towards the artist personally as well as towards his production.”

Yet Albert’s taste seems never to have risen above the level of the time. Although he included Palestrina, Mozart, Bach, and Wagner in the programs he arranged for the concerts at Buckingham Palace, Mendelssohn was his favorite composer. In spite of his flair for Primitives, he made Winterhalter court painter, and Meissonier was one of his favorite artists. His private writing room at Buckingham Palace—where, it is to be supposed, no matter what concessions he might make officially in respect to British popular taste, he would create a personal background expressive of his own taste—is full of the decorative blunders of the time. The moldings of the painted woodwork are painted a deeper color which emphasizes the



Marriage of H. R. H. the Prince of Wales and the Princess Alexandra of Denmark  
in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, March 10, 1863  
From a section of the painting by W. P. Frith, R.A.

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none too good proportions, particularly in the door which has large panels, and a heavily scrolled frieze, also "picked out" in colors. The large-patterned wallpaper is divided into panels by fussy borders. And, not letting well enough alone, the already eye-filling walls are hung with innumerable pictures, large imposing ones and row upon row of very small ones. On a carpet with a rich, all-over pattern the chairs are covered with material of a brightly gay floral design. There are two Louis-Philippe étagères, or what-nots, with marble tops, a chair in pre-Eastlake Gothic, and the inevitable pair of Sèvres vases and massive bronze clock under a bell. A businesslike-looking gasolier hangs from heavy chains over the flat-topped writing table (a dignified piece of the type the early Victorians made so well) loaded with daguerreotypes and mementos. The fireplace is framed by the colored tiles in conventionalized flower designs so dear to the designers of the period. This personal study of Albert the connoisseur is a fussy, confused, and, with all its attempts at cheery comfort, an uncomfortable room. Yet it has the quality possessed by many typical Victorian rooms of the period between the fifties and the sixties, a kind of charm, a look of solid good nature without pretentiousness, yet not lacking in evidence of a confident spirit which is quietly certain that its idiosyncrasies and artistic law-breaking are in rare and perfect taste.

Albert was a sentimentalist and a punster, and in the English décor, after the marriage of Victoria and Albert, appeared all sorts of objects that could have been conceived only in a spirit of extreme bathos or in moments of heavy-handed jocularity. The memento passion was strong with Albert—as it was



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to be with most Victorians throughout the age. When four of the children dressed as "The Seasons" for a Royal birthday entertainment Albert could not trust the camera, as so many fathers have done in similar circumstances, but straightway made a note to call in Mary Thornycroft to immortalize the appealing little actors in marble. These statues, almost unbearably sweet, were placed in "The Highland Home" which soon became a repository for souvenirs in Albertian taste. Here were the "porcelain views," scenes associated with pleasant days painted underglaze on vases that were placed on mantelpieces, cabinets and tables where Albert could see them in making a fond tour in remembrance of things past. Here at Balmoral, also, were the chairs that Albert, in an excess of pride for British industry, had had carved from great blocks of British coal, with staghorn legs. (These were always greatly admired by Balmoral's guests.) Balmoral, with its tartans, its woodwork and floors of pitch pine, its handsome Highlanders which held aloft the lamps for lighting the stairs, and which made such a great impression upon Lady Augusta Stanley, was the summer home of the Royal Family. Here the "lovers," as Lady Augusta calls them, come to live a life that is as near to being a private one as any they will ever know. "This dear paradise," Victoria writes, was her "dearest Albert's *own* creation, own work, own building, own laying out. . . ." Here he worked all day, superintending the gardening and often planting the grounds himself. Here everything spoke of "his great taste," was stamped with "the impress of his dear hand."

If the English aristocracy of the forties found Albert want-

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ing in the necessary qualities of the true British gentleman, Albert, on his side, must have found many things he sought for lacking in the nobility with whom he came into contact. It was saddening to possess a gentle, Teutonic heart, full of warm, poetic feeling for the beautiful and the good, and to turn to others for understanding response to be met by the snubs of a caste that never allowed itself to show emotion in public except in the rituals of sport (which might, on occasions, include patriotism); to whom a too expert knowledge of the arts was slightly discreditable, to whom progress meant extenuation of privilege, and to whom close family life was a rather appalling idea without a good leaven of ridicule and a touch of healthy sadism. It was discouraging to want to help the unprivileged in a country where they were regarded—and regarded themselves—as a race apart, born to belong to “The Poor,” as one might be born a Chinaman or a savage. You could, of course, do something about them; in fact, it was proper for you to set your name down upon the Charity Lists, as Becky Sharp did, signifying yourself as ready to serve at Fancy Fairs for the benefit of the “Destitute Orange-Girl,” the “Neglected Washerwoman” and the “Distressed Muffin-Man.” But it was impossible for you, if you were an early Victorian aristocrat, to see the poor man as an event in the same series in which you yourself occurred; the event you might have been yesterday, the result that might define you tomorrow.

Albert did not ride, shoot, hunt, fish, or carry his head and shoulders in the way the approved English gentleman did these things. And the English gentleman could not under-

stand his earnestness to do his appointed work well, to "give satisfaction" like a servant. Albert, with all his love of jokes, could not understand English humor with its delight in paradox and its relish of the unexpected—provided that it had the quality of appearing original without ever straying too far from the familiar. But above all, no doubt, he found it hard to understand English arrogance built on foundations seemingly as mysterious as English mist—and seemingly as eternal. He gradually put on the reserve of the true English gentleman, only unlike the true English gentleman he never really put it off. It became a second skin, his English cuticle, a delicately fashioned armor grown to the flesh. Inside it he died—for want of air. Victoria might sing *lieder* with him, she might perform with lovely complaisance before the German, Mendelssohn, apologizing like a school girl for singing out of key because of nervousness; she might walk with him with moist eyes at his beloved Rosneau in the Thuringian mountains; she might be his *Liebe Gute Kleine* to whom all the mementos in wood and stone, the valentines of interior decoration produced through Albert's encouragement, represented his "great taste"; but she must always have her other side ready to chill the most delicious moments of *Gemüthlichkeit*, that rarefied atmosphere of her Englishness which made him shrink inside his armor, and which made it increasingly necessary. In every finality she was England. Albert might be the acknowledged leader in their partnership of royalty, but this had nothing to do with the intangible crown by which she became the embodiment of British majesty.

Inevitably Albert became a prig. He also became a pro-



Prince Albert and the Royal Commissioners on Opening Day

From a drawing by John Gilbert

digious worker in an effort to make the country that did not consider him worthy of itself into something that might justify his self-sacrifice in its interests. The International Exhibition

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of 1851, the first great World's Fair, represented an heroic effort on Albert's part to impress England, to impress Victoria with a great work of his own creation. He accomplished his purpose. The English were proud of the enormous collection of objects of art and industry sent from all over the world; after the opening day they liked to call it The Great Exhibition. Victoria was proud to the point of tears.

Yet it was Albert's luck to be overshadowed, even here. In connection with the Exhibition he somehow gets overlooked, and although he is prime mover in the Great Exhibition, Chairman on the Committee of Fine Arts of the House of Commons, and President of the Society of Arts, mention of his name takes on merely the cold formality of his position as husband of the Queen. (It is not to be until six years later that he receives his official title of Prince Consort.) By implication, credit shifts easily from him to England, England and Victoria.

The sun was shining on Great Britain as well as upon Hyde Park when the Exhibition opened its doors. The hunger of the forties had been forgotten. Revolution, which had seemed so near a short while ago, was keeping itself confined to brave, hot words, spoken out of earshot of the Crystal Palace. Not so much was heard now of the brutal drunkenness, the violence and angry restlessness of the thousands of strangers uprooted from the orchards and fields by the march of mechanized industry. Merrie England had grown better behaved, being better off. The Corn Laws had been repealed and bread was cheap—the mobs but a short time before had wept in the streets when Peel died—and British industry was beginning to



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And as a symbol of the dawning period of plenty and high achievement, the great South American water lily had bloomed for the first time in England; the overlarge flower whose petals formed Baroque curves, and whose foundations were well concealed with true Victorian prudery—the prodigious bloom named the *Victoria Regia* for which the wizard gardener, Joseph Paxton, had built a house of glass, lily-shaped and marvelously designed.

The aristocrats had objected to the whole idea of the great international trade exposition from the beginning, with a vague prescience of unaccountable events, a feeling that this was to be the beginning of the end. In the first place it was stupid, in these unsettled times all over Europe, to encourage so many of the people to come pouring into Hyde Park at one time. It was all very well to read about the people in Dickens, and of course it was only right that they should be given a good time, but why in such numbers as the Exhibition would surely call forth, and why in Hyde Park—especially in the section of Hyde Park that had been chosen? This was the gentleman's place of recreation, the neat section in which he went riding in the mornings wearing his high hat, and his long, tight trousers, bobbing up and down on the back of his sleek, thoroughbred hackney; this was the orderly background where, for years, at the ritual hour in the afternoon, curricules, cabriolets, calèches, broughams, pony chaises, and now the recently designed victorias, had glided smoothly in glistening splendor, embellished with crests, ornamental footmen, and embroidered hammer-cloths; where Alfred d'Orsay and Lady

Blessington had streaked by, like exotic butterflies, their arched lips moving in tantalizingly inaudible conversation, brilliance that could only be guessed at by the drab onlookers along the drive. What would happen to all this splendor now that



The first "Shilling-day" at the Crystal Palace  
One of eleven etchings by George Cruikshank, 1851

the masses were to be encouraged to come flocking to the Park?

In the same angry apprehension they had fought, a few years back, against the idea of Stephenson's railroad; with this dirty, ugly, noisy and futile (how could it be made to run *uphill*?) invader of the countryside, what was to become of the fox covers, and without fox covers what was to become of fox hunting, and without fox hunting what was to become of the backbone of English tradition?

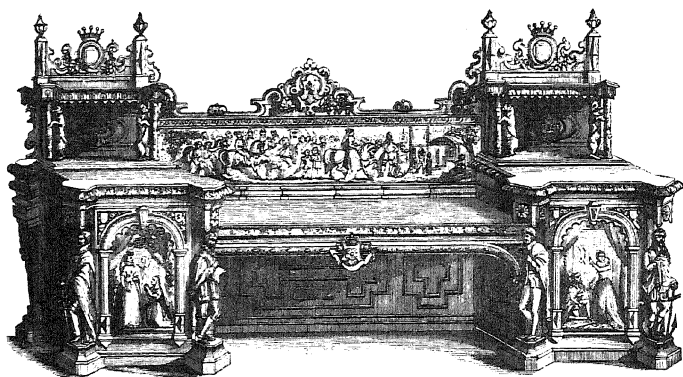


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But the real challenges and defeats were intermingled in the bulky mystery of the future; and when the doors of the Crystal Palace were at last opened—only holders of season's tickets, which cost over a pound, were admitted on the first day—no riots occurred, and the "shilling people" moved in great orderly masses, in and out, scarcely upsetting so much as a blade of grass.

If it were possible to drop in casually on the past, as a few years ago the romantics who had found their catnip in the newly published "Theory of Relativity" liked to dream of doing, and we could present our season's ticket at the door on the opening day in May, 1851, how would the Crystal Palace exhibition appear to us? We would probably find that there are few things, in all this great conglomeration of nineteenth-century products from all over the world, that are not outmoded to the point of absurdity; that there is almost no object in the entire collection, particularly as far as the decorative and applied arts are concerned, that has not about it the slightly repulsive quality of things which are not unfamiliar and therefore possessing the attraction of strangeness, but which we are accustomed to seeing in what we consider to be a greatly improved state. This exhibition which was England's pride and the envy of the whole world would seem to us to be a sort of glorified Coney Island bazaar full of grotesque "oddities."

Yet it would be stupid to go back in time if a laugh would be all that we could get out of it. We who have made the journey back catch the contagion from the thousands who are awed and impressed by the spectacle of so many things gath-



Buffet carved with historical scenes, made from a great oak cut down near Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire, in 1842. Designed by Cookes and Sons, Warwick



Furniture in Louis-Philippe style in black walnut with characteristic Baroque forms and carved ornaments. Covered with crimson and gold damask. Manufactured by J. & W. Hilton, Montreal

*All from "The Art-Journal Illustrated Catalogue"*

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ered together in one place with so many people. There is a strong, rich flavor in this overladen, overconfident scene, the subdued excitement of those who are feeling the elation of the wonderful *Now*. This is the first blossoming of the age of iron, the age of steam; it is an age which feels itself breaking from the past, but is determined to make the break slowly, quietly, sensibly and with dignity, leaving nothing behind and, for safety, to carry along with it all the heaviest and most cumbersome heritages of the spirit.

There is a gentle rhythm in the slow, clipperlike movement of the hoopskirts bellowing beneath the short, tight jackets and the long, pointed Cashmere shawls, in the bobbing of the stove-pipe hats and the swirling of long coat tails. From the balconies it is a scene of tiny figures moving in a kind of mesmerized dance in the gigantic shed of iron and glass which overpowers even the identities of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Duke of Wellington, and Prince Albert: here, even Victoria, herself, becomes insignificant. Paxton's Crystal Palace is of these Victorians and beyond them.

We have seen many structures which owe their design to the Crystal Palace—the cast-iron sheds in old railway stations with their grimy canopies of glass. Here, the May sunshine streams in in long, slanting bars through the clean, clear glass of roof and walls. Full-grown elms have been enclosed where they stood, with the spring's sparrows' nests already built in their branches. (The structural ironwork is lightened by being painted a bright blue, one of the "modern" touches that scandalized the conservative art critics.) Even the many heroic statues are dwarfed by the enormous canopy of glass

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towards which fountains shoot up their streams of water—one of them has a jet of eau de Cologne—and under which an organ is playing; in spite of the fact that it has two hundred voices it sounds “like nothing” in the vast building.

Prince Albert, never very fortunate, had the luck to find genius when making his plans for the structure which was to house his international exhibition. He had also the rare perception to recognize the superiority of this genius’ ideas over the official architect’s plans under consideration. Paxton’s designs—the original draft was merely scribbled on a scrap of paper—seem to have contained a kind of magic that enthralled the careful, suspicious-minded men going so cautiously in an age of confusing novelties; it was a last-moment entry among the plans submitted, and there was no time to weigh matters, or to indulge in better second-thoughts: the plan was adopted before any one could quite realize what had happened.

Had Paxton set out to produce something amazingly original, the greatest, most stupendous structure that had ever been, it is doubtful if he would have succeeded, for this was not his way of working. He built with what he knew—had Bessemer’s steel experiments been completed at the time, he would have built with steel—and he built in the way he knew. He was above all a gardener. He had designed greenhouses of glass and iron at Chatsworth, the Duke of Devonshire’s estate, and had devised simple means for heating them. He had carefully studied the mammoth water lily from British Guiana (it was through his care that it had been made to bloom in this northern climate) and had observed how its enormous, umbrellalike leaf was fortified with pillars and transverse



*Photograph by Walker & Cockerell*

Prince Albert  
From the portrait by Winterhalter

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girders for support of the heavy lily. His Crystal Palace design was no more complicated, no more simple than the construction of the water lily. In an age when even a dining-room chair was a difficult thing to move about, stability being one of the ruling ideas of the time, the units of the Crystal Palace were relatively light. They could be taken down with ease and transported to another place, and set up again in the same—or in a different—combination; and they were all easily replaceable. If in the Crystal Palace the Victorians had a giddy sense of being off the ground, it was because they were; in it, they were off the ground of their own century, but not quite landed in the century to follow.

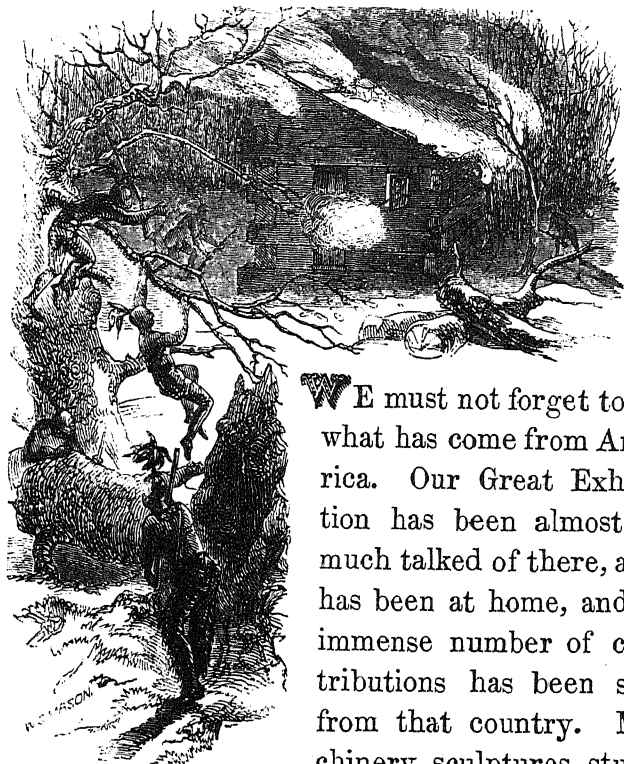
On the arch over one of the principal aisles, with its crimson carpet for royal feet, there was the inscription (the same as that over the door of the Royal Exchange in London)—“The Earth is the Lord’s and the Fulness Thereof.” But to Victoria a more appropriate inscription, at least one nearer to her own personal feelings, would have been the sentence she wrote at the end of her diary account of that first, glorious day: “God bless my dearest Albert!”

God bless dearest Albert! He had brought it all about, this triumphant collaboration between royalty and industry for the apotheosis of the successful bourgeoisie. Albert has here brought together inspiration and encouragement for the expression of nineteenth-century middle-class taste and, for years to come, the ever-developing machines will be turning out objects that reflect the dazzled imaginations of British designers who have had careful selections from among all the arts of the world, and



*From "The Illustrated Exhibitor"*

Group of objects exhibited by Mr. Messinger of Birmingham—  
which was awarded a "prize medal"



WE must not forget to see what has come from America. Our Great Exhibition has been almost as much talked of there, as it has been at home, and an immense number of contributions has been sent from that country. Machinery, sculptures, stuffs, carriages, minerals, boots and shoes, iron-work, and wines, have been dispatched over to the Exhibition.

America was formerly inhabited by numerous tribes of Red Indians,—a wild, warlike race,—of whom but few now remain, and those not at all civilized; but the greater number of the white

How they looked at us eighty-eight years ago

Page 55 and part of page 56 from *The World's Fair or Children's Prize Gift Book of the Great Exhibition*, published in 1851 by Thomas Dean & Son and Ackermann Brothers, London



people of America are the same in their dress, manners, and language, as ourselves.

A large portion of America is called the United States, which is a Republic; that is, it is governed by the people themselves, without a king, queen, and a royal family; they appoint a President every four years. Long ago, the United States belonged to the English, but the natives gradually grew more powerful than they had been, and threw off all foreign control.

America produces every kind of grain and fruit, as well as spices, dye-woods, and balsams. The people export quantities of natural productions to Europe, but their manufacturers are not as yet able to compete with those of what are called the *old* countries. The principal manufactures are of cotton, woollen, iron, and leather; which they exchange with the Red Indians for prepared bark, skins, and birds' feathers.

all the ages, spread out before them in their own Hyde Park. For their benefit, each country, including their own, has painstakingly chosen the best examples of its official art into which the dead level of competent mediocrity is invariably given expression.

God bless dearest Albert! Not only for the models of English lighthouses and docks, the cotton mills "in full operation," the printing presses running off copies of *The Times*, and "other curious machines requiring steam motive power"; not only for these and the model houses for The Poor (an early Govern-

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ment Housing project and very near to Albert's heart) but for the silk robes and embroidered screens from China, the carpets from Tunis, the watches and musical instruments from Switzerland; the mirrors, sofas, laces, *blondes*, gold- and silversmiths' work, artificial flowers and Erard pianos from France.

For the damasks, woollens, and flannels from Belgium; the toys, boots and shoes from Austria; the Turkish and Arabian brocades, silks, muslins and furs; the leather from Portugal; the intarsia work and the silks from Italy; and the "ornamental cabinets" from Russia. For the British Kidderminster and Axminster carpets, and Nottingham lace curtains, and the decorative knick-knacks from Birmingham. For the furniture in oak, rosewood and gilded American pine, and the cast-iron clocks and statuettes, gilded and ungilded and placed under cases of glass; and for the "mechanical lamps," Carcel and "Moderator," for burning oil and camphene. For the bright bolts of cloth, sarsnet, plush, tabinet, jaconet and bombazine; Aubusson carpets and Sèvres vases taller than a man. For the massive Renaissance-style cabinets of carved oak with their sculptures in wood, and their panels with scenes painted in oils, and for the ebony piano inlaid with mother-of-pearl. For the tables, desks, chairs and pianos in papier-mâché, and for the British "Day Dreamer's Chair" in papier-mâché with its winged thoughts representing "happy and joyous dreams," and dreams "troublesome and unpleasant."

Dearest Albert has opened his arms wide to let them all in, even Germany who has brought not only her carpets and shawls, a "type machine" and an electric telegraph, but Herr Krupp's latest model gun which exhibits, before industry has



From "The Illustrated Exhibitor"

### General view of the American department

Next to "The Greek Slave," McCormick's reaper attracted the most attention in the American section which was considered on the whole to be a failure

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had time to catch its breath, the future possibilities of one of the most important of recent discoveries—cast steel.

Victoria, in her breathless record, does not neglect to mention the statues at the Crystal Palace. She speaks in one ecstatic breath of “the mixture of palms, flowers, statues . . .” Although her favorite sculptor was Marochetti, whose colossal *Richard Cœur de Lion* she admired, she looked again and again at the *Amazon* by Herr Kiss, cast from zinc. There were numerous Amazons in “the mixture” (one Amazon group was of iron inlaid with silver) ; was this wishful thinking on the part of the early nineteenth-century sculptors, dominated by the Victorian “female” muffled in her crinolines, bonnets and shawls?

But the sculptural work that attracted the most attention was that of the American, Hiram Powers. His *Greek Slave*, of heroic size, of purest white marble, her hands held together by iron chains forged from the actual metal itself, fascinated the visitors to the Crystal Palace. Standing on her crimson-covered pedestal in a niche formed by a canopy and curtains of crimson cloth, where the art-lover could, by turning the crank at the side, make her slowly revolve in all her touching virginal shame, *The Greek Slave* might well have been the inspiration for the “living statues” of Barnum’s circus.

“It stands alone in the Crystal Palace,” writes a contemporary American visitor, David Bartlett, “untouched by any other piece of sculpture there.” But his pride in this American work, and his even greater pride in the reaping machine manufactured by McCormick, which “at first did not attract much attention, but after its merits were known a crowd always sur-

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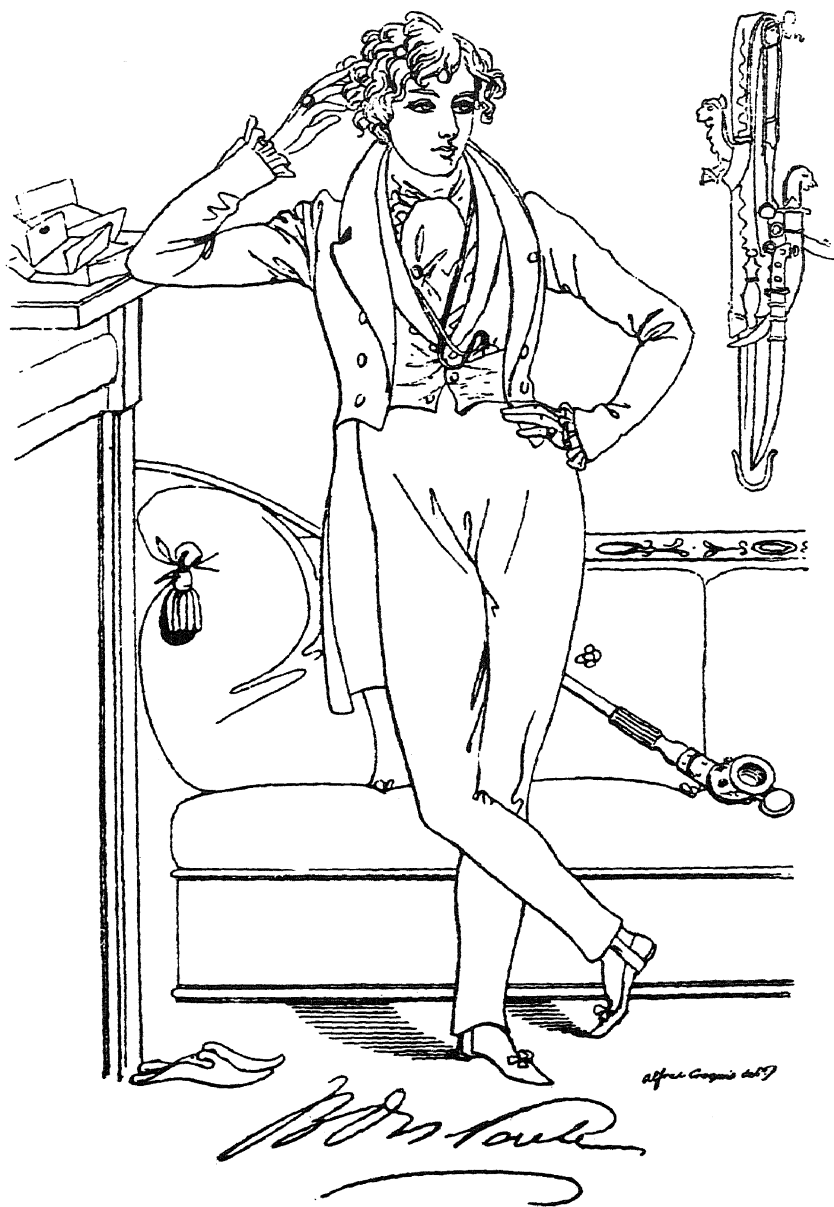
rounded it," could not blind him to the fact that the American department was something of a failure. "Brother Jonathan," a contemporary English account tells us, sent remarkably fine Southern hams, as well as india rubber, shawls, bonnets and daguerreotypes (early attempts at snapshots of the moon and of Niagara Falls), but on the whole the section beneath the enormous American organ, surmounted by a great gilded eagle, was rather paltry in comparison to the exhibitions of other nations. "The anticipations of the Americans," the Englishman's account reads, "were more grandiose than their display."

The patriotic Mr. Bartlett goes further. "America was the laughing stock of Europe," he writes in indignation, and, he says, "the journals of Paris and London went into convulsions of merriment at our expense." He would not blame the Government for the failure, although he points out that it was "lacking in sufficient alacrity" in seizing upon its opportunities in the beginning; and then, assuming a loftier point of view, he comes to the conclusion that, after all, it is in the intangibles that his country really excels, that America's "superiority to the rest of the world" lies in "our universal suffrage, education, absence of poverty, industry and *moral-ity*." And warming still further to his subject, he concludes that "we should not be afraid to avow to the whole world that we would ten thousand times rather . . . stand first in education, happiness, and *moral-ity*, than in manufactures or in the fine arts." (After the exhibition is over, Mr. Bartlett loses some of his high moral tone when he indulges in a good last-laugh "when our yacht shot past all her competitors.")

## THE CHASTELY BEAUTIFUL

EVEN before The Great Exhibition had closed its doors, and the Royal Family and David Bartlett, Esq., had come to take a last look around as the workmen got ready to roll up the flags of all nations, it must have been evident to those who could read the signs that history had been made within the walls of the Crystal Palace. Like it or not, it must now be admitted that the machine was a thing of vital importance, no longer to be dismissed as the mere obsession of cranks whose mission in life, if any, was to make the rest of humanity feel secure in its comfortable sanity; and something more than the occasional entertainment of Saturday afternoons and Bank holidays when one might watch the hypnotizing motions of machines performing the same action over and over again—a change from the gaping at General and Mrs. Tom Thumb and the Bloomer women from America.

Mr. Ruskin in his tower, from which he called the faithful to prayer, might fulminate against the horror and hideousness of the steam-motivated world, the railway and the factory—all Beauty, being a manifestation of God, must contain a practical sermon—but it was too late now to heed even Mr. Ruskin. Bewildered and grimy gatherings about the “publics” and “spirit vaults” in Spitalfields and St. Giles might curse “the iron hand” that had abruptly canceled the best working years



*From a drawing by Alfred Croquis*

### Endymion

Benjamin Disraeli, in the early days before he became Lord Beaconsfield, with a taste for rococo gilt furniture and yellow damask

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of so many artisans, but alcoholic recriminations could not stop the wheels from going round.

Even the aristocrats whose carriages with painted crests on the doors had had to fight for right of way with crammed omnibuses to get to the entrance to the Palace of Glass, must now see that the age of exclusiveness was losing its hold, ceding ground on all sides. Not long ago they had poured into Gore House in South Kensington where the relics of a more graceful and leisurely age were being auctioned off to the new moneyed classes. The auctioneer was now lording it in the drawing-room with its delicate Regency and its Louis-Philippe furniture; the room of swan forms and lyre forms, of ottomans and *poufs* and silk and silver brocade, and white chairs inlaid with mother-of-pearl and upholstered in white satin on which were landscapes and flowers painted in oils by famous artists, where Lady Blessington had sat, radiant in the light of candles and camphene lamps, while the liveried and bewigged man at the door announced Lord Lytton, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Brougham, Lord Chesterfield, Thackeray, Walter Savage Landor, Benjamin Disraeli (with his father), and even the people's Homer, Charles Dickens.

Here at this door where the miscellaneous crowds are pouring in to have a look at the stage-set although the play is over, a trembling footman came in—only a year ago—to announce a pale man with strange eyes, Prince Louis-Napoleon, escaped from the fortress at Ham.

There are more women in the room now than it ever held during the entire period that Gore House was leased to Lady Blessington. Few men, no matter what their rank might be,





*From a drawing by Alfred Croquis*

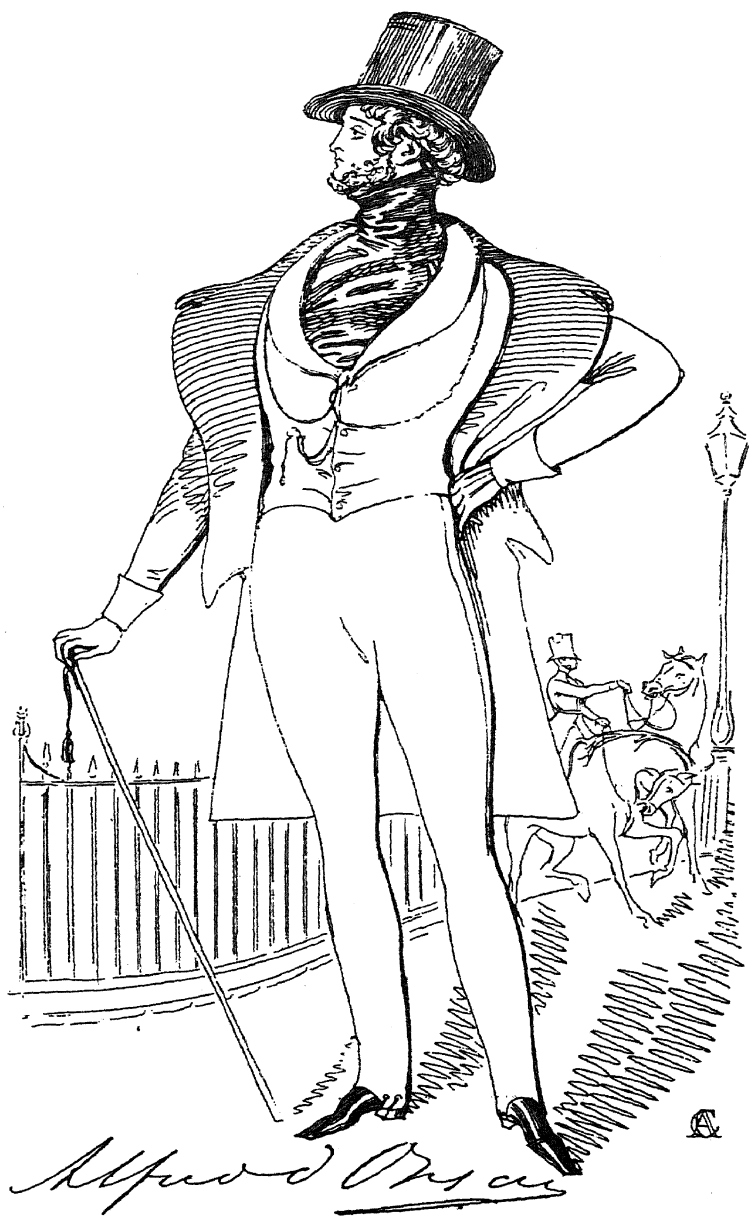
### Margaret, Lady Blessington

Few men, no matter what their rank might be, would pass up a chance to go to one of her parties—but they left the women of the family at home

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would pass up a chance to go to one of Lady Blessington's parties—but they left the women of the family at home. The Duchesses are here now, though, with the wives of the Dickens characters from Bristol and Wapping, sniffing the *blondes*, the brocades, the Italian needlework, the fans painted and carved, and picking up the copies of the "Books of Beauty," remainders from the limited editions published by Lady Blessington for special subscribers who had their gilt-edged copies bound in silk of the right color to match their salons. The "Books of Beauty" were an adroit money-making scheme thought up by Lady Blessington, or d'Orsay (he later got out a similar kind of "keepsake," the "Book of Celebrity") in the days before publicity agents were known; they were albums of copper-plate engravings of beautiful women (many of them, the subscribers themselves) with poetic descriptions and other writings of "female" appeal, most of them written by Lady Blessington. In one of these books her own portrait, wearing her coronet, is the frontispiece.

From the walls in her drawing-room she is looking down now upon the crowds as they peer into her personal belongings, even opening the drawers of her writing table—do they expect some dark, feminine secret to pop out of these drawers where her manuscripts once lay, the banal "Idler in Italy" and "Idler in France," and the school-girlish "Conversations with Lord Byron" in which the peeress herself does all the talking? There are several portraits (the most famous is by Sir Thomas Lawrence) showing her wearing her famous headdress, her eyes too bright, her smile too ready, with an Irish look of forgiving, through scorn and humor, a stupid world. While the



*From a drawing by Alfred Croquis*

### **The Prince of Dandys**

Alfred, Count d'Orsay, the brilliant butterfly of the Regency, found life chilly under Victorianism

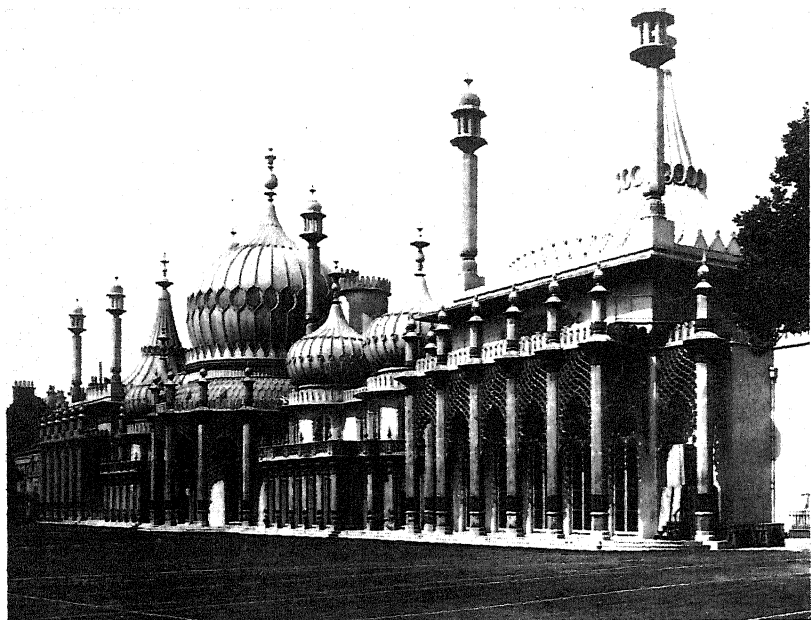
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auctioneer pounds his gavel, the curious are straying through the house. How many servants' rooms there are in this house where two people lived (one of them, officially at least, only a guest); cheerless dormitories in this palace of luxury! Upstairs in Lady Blessington's bedroom there is a large, red-faced man from one of the towns in Staffordshire. He came with the notion of going off with some trophy from this silken world, but now his eyes are glued in something like physical pain upon Lady Blessington's bed—it was Alfred d'Orsay who designed it—with the silver columns that frame it in, and the silver swans that support it, and the clouds of blue satin and blue lace that hang about it like some fabulous ceiling creation of the great Tiepolo. This is the bed that Lady Blessington described as "chastely beautiful," thereby giving the Victorian decorators who came after her a phrase useful for their own verbal misapplications.

To the gentleman from Staffordshire wearing the purple coat and mustard-colored trousers, to the housewives lately from Birmingham, Manchester and Bristol, in their bonnets and Cashmeres, above all to the auctioneer, a trifle confused by the heady perfumes from the past he has stirred up, and whose persuasive skill has failed him now and then in his sales' talk—after all, this is 1849, he will be thinking—it is obvious that this house represents a world that is passing.

It was the world of the young years of the nineteenth century, of George IV as Prince of Wales, of Beau Brummell and the choker collar, of the dandys and lions, of the fantastic Brighton Pavilion with its wall decorations of serpents and dragons and birds (its two greatest admirers have been P. T.

Barnum and Osbert Sitwell) ; the world where the aristocratic game of living on credit was brought to the perfection of a fine art. These two glittering creatures which it had produced helped to prolong it, even as the gathering forces that were



Brighton Pavilion

"St. Paul's come to Brighton and pupped" was one of many witticisms brought forth by this exotic structure which was the inspiration of most carnival architecture in years to come

to develop into the more sober and conscientious Victorian world were at work about them.

In the years after Waterloo they had made their celebrated journey to France and Italy; the Earl of Blessington was with them, as well as a corps of maids, valets, cooks and guides. With their baggage vans laden with furniture, bedding, kitchen

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equipment, dogs, cats and bird cages, and Lady Blessington's sleeping carriage and library carriage, they spread themselves out over the roads across the Alps like the caravan of some Eastern potentate escaped from his proper position in time and space. At Missolonghi, Lady Blessington lost her faith in the Byron legend—she had met the poet himself. After three years in Naples the caravan wound its way back through the Alps to Paris where Lady Blessington slept in the swan bed while the Earl of Blessington commuted to the House of Lords, and d'Orsay was welcomed as a returning countryman by Rachel, Lamartine, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Vigny and Gavarni, as well as by the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

One was beautiful and one lived in beauty. A radiance came from the Anglicized Frenchman that no one could resist; even the poor forgave him and loved him for decorating a life they knew could be so bitter. When on a snowy day he drove Lady Blessington out in the Bois in a painted sleigh shaped like a dragon, muffled up to his curly mustaches in a tiger skin robe, the common people cheered.

Gore House, now being sold, was the end of magnificence. Here d'Orsay spent the long, dreary days as a hunted man waiting for the release that nightfall would bring. These round looking-glasses in the carved, gilded frames have reflected his broad shoulders and slim waist as he makes the little, aimless, wheeling steps of an idle man in an empty room. Now he sits on one of Lady Blessington's "chaste" mother-of-pearl chairs to work out an invention he has thought up which will be sold to one of those badly dressed gentlemen who own engines driven by steam, and there will be money again to pay for

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more good times. But his mind wanders from the diagram he is making, and it begins to weave an elaborate play upon words, a long-winded witticism expressing his situation that begins with an anecdote and ends in a pun; it will be something on the order of Brummell's "broken bow," but it will be better than that, for d'Orsay is composing it. He will spring it on Margaret Blessington at dinner in order to hear her wonderful laugh, the only sensuous thing about her—a laugh that has misled many men.

At last the sun goes down and the interminable London twilight comes, nevertheless, to an end, and he can go out to Crockford's without being held up by the bogey men of business with their sordid little bills.

Gore House was sold two years before the Crystal Palace opened, and they went immediately to Paris to escape imprisonment for debt. Not long afterward they had both dissolved completely into their legend; Lady Blessington by an overdose of sleeping medicine a few months after the flight to Paris—d'Orsay, in 1852, after a short term of honest employment as Director of the Beaux-Arts, a post Louis-Napoleon had given him. He died carefully dressed in his magnificent plum-colored quilted dressing gown, his hair as beautifully curled as ever, his shoes as highly polished, his linen as immaculate and as delicately embroidered: All ready at the end, as his amiable doctor said, to bowl over St. Peter.

He and Lady Blessington had lived in London on the fringe of the Victorian world, like light, fiery substance too volatile to be drawn to the center. And then the heavy settling of mid-Victorianism had heaved them off, the last of the graces: it

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would not produce others like them. The hard-working politician, Disraeli, with his satin coats and his flowered waistcoats, and his bright green trousers with white stripes; the rings on his fingers—over his gloves!—his hair plastered into ringlets with Macassar oil, and his overcharged Oriental eloquence (he never mastered the gentlemanly art of cool, impersonal insult) was the best mid-Victorians had to offer—a poor pastiche of a dandy.

Moralists of the period, now that his charm was no longer there to dazzle them, tempered their pronouncements upon d'Orsay's personality with ethical "buts." That he had been a parasite and a libertine could not (now) be denied—but how good, charming, agreeable, fascinating he had been! And not merely decorative and useless. At one time it had been "the thing" to sit to him for one's portrait. Contemporaries speak in praise of his skill as a draftsman; and Lamartine showered glowing praise upon the marble bust d'Orsay had done of him, saying, in effect, that it was the most beautiful and noble head he had ever seen—and a perfect likeness.

Oddly enough, d'Orsay had also gained somehow a knack for practical science and he invented several appliances, including an alarm signal to be used on railways, that had potentialities of value.

And, apart from his legend, he left behind him practical legacies to the modern world. When he appeared riding in Rotten Row after a shower, muffled up in an odd-looking coat of shaggy material (he had bought it on the way from a sailor, to protect his clothes) he set a fashion that has persisted—d'Orsay's sailor's coat was the first appearance of the overcoat.



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Because he preferred to wear dark clothes and accessories even in the daytime when other Victorians were still enjoying their right to indulge themselves in the bright colors proper to the male in nature, those who believed that the great dandy could do no wrong followed his example. Fashion took the hint, and by degrees men had to give up the idea that they were things of beauty, and eventually crept meekly into the drab, utilitarian, ugly and uncomfortable uniform of the modern business suit.

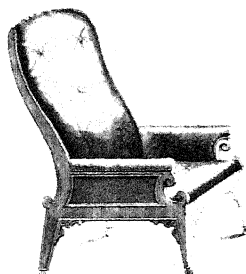
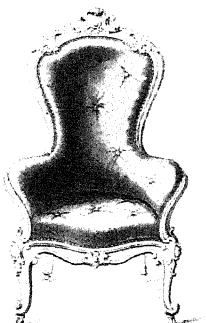
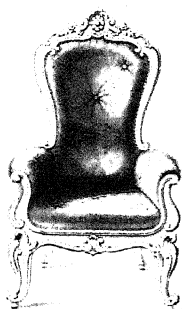
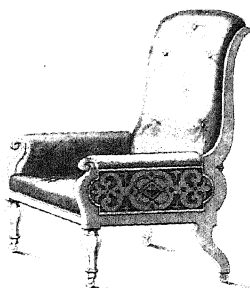
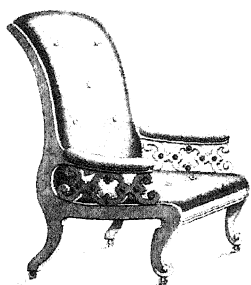
Also because of the ingenious d'Orsay modern living is made more simple and attractive for those who must economize on space in the average English and American home. In his last living quarters, the top floor of the house on the rue de la Ville l'Evêque in Paris, that belonged to the painter, Gudin, he created for himself a background that was the best he could manage now that there was no more Blessington fortune, not even Blessington royalties, to pay for spaciousness and a complicated décor. In his single room he telescoped the functions of many rooms, drawing-room, dining-room and bedroom—as well as a studio; and the modern living room, with day bed and large divans (d'Orsay also slung up hammocks) came into being.

A magical person, an anachronism even in the days of the Regency. He belonged at the court of Louis XV, an exquisite carried to the point of perfection, with no tarnished overtones of the democratic compromise between perfection and the urge-of-the-many.

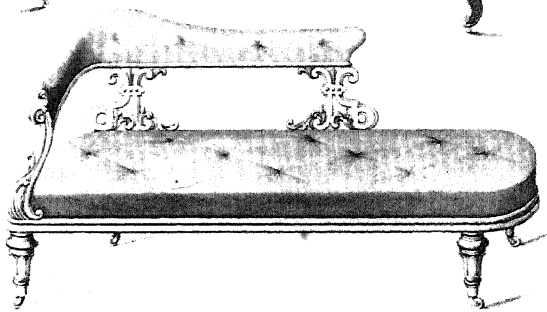
## STEAM, GLUE, AND THE ROMANTIC ILLUSION

WHEN there are Count d'Orsays to set the styles a certain sense of fitness and logic is to be expected. D'Orsay had wrapped himself up in the sailor's coat because it was the very thing he had needed at the moment to keep his clothes dry. (For the reigning beau to be seen in a wilted costume would have been something near to catastrophe.) His followers imitated the overcoat merely because d'Orsay had worn one, and not because of its practical value, and yet it was this value that made the style survive long after d'Orsay himself was dead.

When the owner of a great house had gone to his cabinet maker in the eighteenth century to order pieces for a certain room, or for a particular purpose, his ideas and requirements were carried out by skilled craftsmen who knew how to interpret the ideas in a practical way, and these creations were certain to attract another client who would have not only similar requirements, but who would be able to say that he had pieces in his house exactly like those in the house with a well-known name. If the cabinet maker was a master of the trade there might be often a somewhat arbitrary interpretation of the client's wishes, but, in any case, some sort of collaboration would have taken place—to the enrichment of design.



A piece much admired in the  
Crystal Palace Exhibition.  
Carved walnut cabinet made  
by Hanson & Son, Oxford St.



*Chairs and sofa reproduced from "The Cabinet-maker's Assistant," Blackie and Son, Glasgow*

Design in Mid-Victorian furniture

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With the increasing commercialization of the crafts during the fifties and sixties, collaboration between client and craftsman became less frequent, and fashions, instead of being founded on the ideas of fastidious individuals, became the mysterious two-headed monster, Fashion, which rules implacably without its awed subjects' having the slightest idea why they are its slaves.

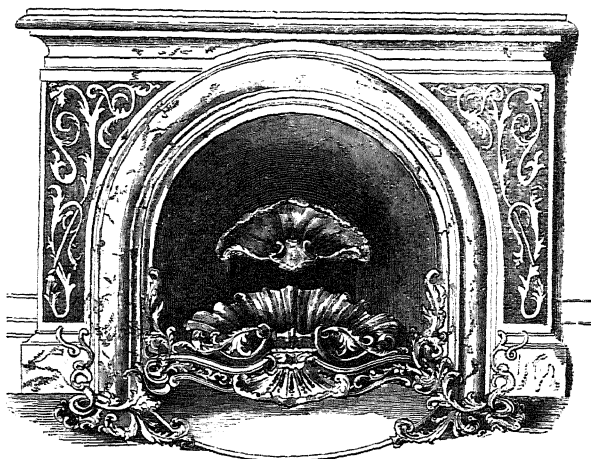
Chippendale's was a busy workshop, often kept going all night long in order to get the important orders out on time, but with the precision with which every detail was carried out in making the basic construction, the care that went into carving, and the hand labor required for expert finishing, even small pieces were long in the making. Now that the workshops were equipped with the impersonal, steam-driven engine, an entire room could be furnished in less time than it had taken the famous cabinet makers to turn out a single large piece. With the aid of the band saw and the glue pot the painstaking art of the carver was less in demand. Manufactured varnishes, chemical treatment of wood, and the great use of over-stuffed pieces which almost did away with the need for cabinet making, were all aids in speeding up the manufactured article.

To the ever-growing numbers of the prosperous middle-class the product of the factories had the virtue of being different from what had gone before, and the price was neither too high for practical men of affairs who prided themselves upon knowing the value of money, nor too low for those who were now in a position to command "the best of everything."

When every one is buying them, sitting on them, eating on

them and sleeping on them, the furniture put into the market by the factory inevitably becomes desirable. The question of taste had long since dropped out, excess baggage in the pleasant flight of Progress—another nineteenth-century monster with two heads.

Now design is dictated from below and rises slowly upward,



Nautilus stove

*The Illustrated Exhibitor*, from which this is reproduced, states under the heading General Hardware in the Crystal Palace: "In bronze works our neighbours, the French, have us at a decided advantage, but in the more useful articles, such as stoves, lamps etc., we think that we can teach them a lesson"

instead of the reverse process which has been the rule. The large houses—if one can still afford to keep them up—with carvings attributed to Grinling Gibbons, or at any rate in the style known by his name, and Adam; or, in the older houses, by the craftsmen from Flanders and Italy; with their rooms filled with furniture from the workshops of the master cabinet makers of Georgian times, crowd in the new objects here and

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there, and gradually make room for accessories of the same order, until the original character has been obliterated and the effect, if not wholly desirable, gives at least the pleasant satisfaction of contemporaneousness. Even the Royal Palaces of Buckingham and Windsor, with their signed pieces by Caffieri, Riesener and Jacob, find room for the new pieces designed in "the modern taste."

Merrie England is rising in the world now, and become respectable; a shopkeeper on a big scale which insists upon expressing outwardly the dignity of its new position. In the cities, in the row upon row of "brick boxes with slate lids" the background of the prosperous man of affairs and his family—almost invariably a large one—is as full of plot and counter-plot, of incident and melodramatic surprise as the current three-decker novels which his wife buys but seldom has the time to read.

In his front drawing-room the long, narrow looking-glass between the long, narrow windows, with its gilt frame carved in neo-Baroque design, and with its marble-topped console, also elaborately carved, reflects a Brussels carpet of "sour green." There is a great deal of furniture in the room. There are two or three sofas, a large one, charmingly curved and elaborately carved in flower or fruit design (much of it will be glued on) and one or two smaller ones, vaguely Empire in shape, carved and upholstered to match the large piece. There will be one or two armchairs to match these sofas, and possibly side chairs. (This is the beginning of the furniture "suites.") These will be of rosewood or ebonized wood, or pine

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painted black, or they may be of mahogany. They will be upholstered in reps of dark red or green. (In more pretentious houses the covering will be of plush or satin, and then the colors may be brighter, golden yellow or sapphire blue.)

There will be numerous small chairs placed about the room in such a way that they attain a splendid air of aloofness, each at its own angle with no relation to the rest. There will be chairs with key-ring backs, or with backs that have no suggestion of a bar but are mere skeletons of the famous loop backs of Hepplewhite. There will be also chairs of imitation ebony, and chairs of marquetry and of papier-mâché.

In papier-mâché the mid-Victorian had an ideal medium for his decorative purposes since his aim was to achieve the grand manner at small cost. It was not an exclusively nineteenth-century material; objects of many kinds, mostly small pieces, boxes, tea caddys and trays, had been made of papier-mâché in the eighteenth century. Nor was it an English invention; the process, like so many other decorative ideas and designs, came to England, as well as to France, from the Orient. But Birmingham, that hive of industrious plagiarists, produced papier-mâché furniture and objects that at times rose to such heights of ingenious hideousness that they cease to be merely "amusing," and must be granted the respect due to works of art, however repellent. Later Victorians, bitten with esthetic self-consciousness and turning furiously against the recent past, repudiated the gorgeous papier-mâché pieces which were then shipped off to South America and to India, sold at good prices by shrewd merchants who had not the modern handicap of swift communication to stand in the way of effective sales' talk

about "the latest thing." It is this wholesale dumping of a discarded style, and not the inherent quality of papier-mâché itself, which makes pieces in this material so rare; papier-mâché is as strong as any ordinary cabinet makers' wood, and stronger



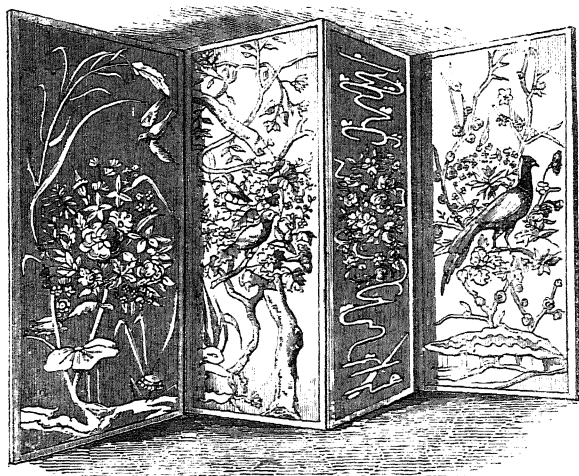
*Courtesy of James Pendleton, Inc., New York*

Papier-mâché pieces with mother-of-pearl inlay and gold decoration.  
French lamp of "coated" black glass

than the rare woods. The process produced a material not dissimilar in certain qualities to the modern plywood used for furniture—the idea in both being that many thin layers of material (in the case of modern plywood, scientifically arranged to produce the greatest resistance) are stronger than a solid piece. Pulpy paper like blotting paper was used, treated to flour



and water and an adhesive, and then laid on a mold of the desired shape. Frequent shellackings and varnishings were then given, each dried at a high temperature. (A lengthy process suited to a period when materials were more costly than labor.)



*From "The Illustrated Exhibitor"*

**Embroidered screen worked in tent-stitch on canvas**

Brightly colored screens added to the general confusion in the fashionable Victorian room. This one was almost six feet high

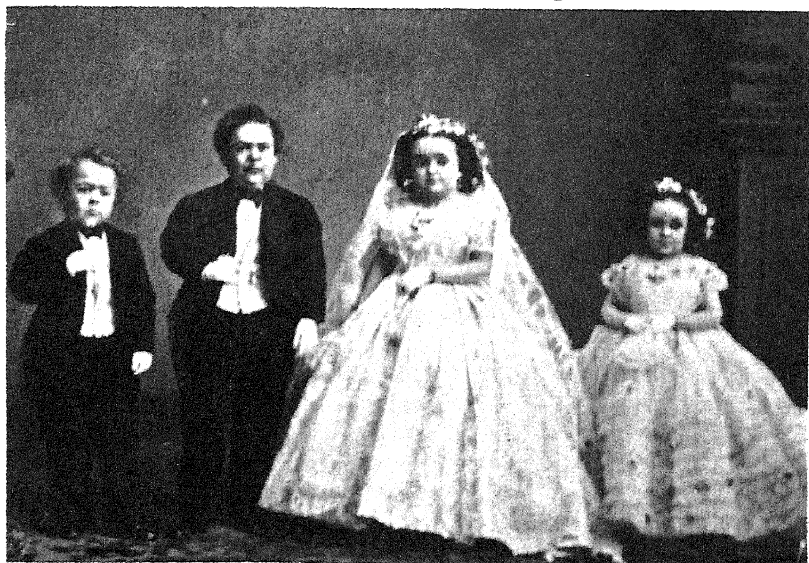
With transfer patterns, paint, mother-of-pearl and other shell substances, gold and silver dust, and ornate moldings, the "home furnisher" of the day had, in papier-mâché, "a most attractive surface alike to the industrial skill of the humble artisan and to the genius of the artist. . . ." Chairs, tables, sofas, cabinets, writing desks, screens and vases, and even piano-fortes were made of papier-mâché. (A strange inversion occurred when furniture of wood was made in imitation of papier-mâché—itself an imitation of wood.)

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Besides his chairs of papier-mâché, perhaps painted black with gleaming transfer patterns of flowers and birds in gold, the prosperous man of affairs will have in his drawing-room a fair-sized ottoman covered in velvet or wool-work with a chenille or woollen fringe. There will be a footstool or two topped with wool-work or bead-work, the product of the housewife's industry, and numerous other small articles whose chief purpose seems to be to keep the room from having any bare spots. Bareness is intolerable in this withdrawn world. The windows are heavily draped with dark reps or plush, or satin, and what light might come in from the outside is masked by the curtains of Nottingham or Brussels lace. As every line of decoration is clothed with some shielding curve, all bare surfaces are covered up with draperies, skirts and ruffles of velvet, satin or embroidery. Even the marble mantel shelf has its hanging drapery, with a "Vandyked" edge and decorated with beadwork, or embroidered with metal threads.

This interior is not only a place for the more formal moments of the family life, it is also a museum of the family history. The records of several generations are exposed here for all the world to read. Ancestral portraits may be lacking, but there are crayon portraits of various members of the family and its relations. There are steel engravings of wedding-journey scenes, Fingal's Cave, and a lake in the Trossachs, and flower and fruit pieces painted by the daughters and the wife when a girl. On the what-nots of rosewood or ebonized wood there will be tender family mementos, such as a gilt bronze cast of the first baby's first shoe, and, in an embroidered case, a Russian bullet extracted from a remote cousin at Inkerman.

There is much to be said for the what-not. Meaningless, formless and functionless, it is nevertheless a commanding object. Like the English of the period, it has a robust quality that commands respect; an air of seeming to know what one



*Photograph by M. B. Brady, New York, 1863*

**"General and Mrs. Tom Thumb"**

At the time of their wedding in 1863. Later they were presented to Queen Victoria and the Empress Eugénie. "Tom Thumb" gave imitations, including one of Fanny Elssler, the Viennese dancer

is doing in the world without having the least concern about outside opinion. An inventory of the objects held by a pair of what-nots in the average man of affairs' drawing-room might read: A basket of fruit and a basket of flowers of colored wax under glass cases; a vase of wood wound about with narrow willow reeds, gilded, and painted on either side with cupids, each vase filled with tall silvery grasses with gilded stems,

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bound in red ribbon tied in a bow; a basket of colored bead-work; a cast-iron statuette of Napoleon (England's most popular victim); a "Leaning Tower of Pisa" in zinc; a piece of rock from Australia with bright specks supposed to be gold; a "Cleopatra's Needle" in Derbyshire spar, and a bird's-nest petrified in the caves at Matlock (geological souvenirs are popular in this time of discovery); a gilded china dish in the form of a human hand; a concha shell or two; a daguerreotype in a plush case of General and Mrs. Tom Thumb (next to them, Emerson was the most popular American); a daguerreotype of a child's grave in a frame of Tunbridge Ware (an English manufactured mosaic in varicolored woods); a pair of Sir Walter Scott lovers in Staffordshire ware, and a bust of Byron in lava stone ("The Isles of Greece")!

Overtones of the great days of Versailles and of Hampton Court are present in this fortress of democracy in the high, coved ceiling of molded plaster, painted a glaring white—a dazzling expanse of almost nakedness to which the eye wanders hopefully but without relief; and the chandelier, a version of the great, glittering lustres of the foreign royal palaces, shrunken but still glittering with crystal "prisms." These may hold candles or oil lamps, or may be fitted with gas burners. (In modest houses the crystal chandelier may be substituted for by cast-iron gas- or lamp-fixtures, painted or gilded.)

In this interior there are numerous colors here and there but they are swallowed up by each other, so that the general effect is like that of a palette on which all the contents of the paint tubes have been scrambled together—producing something that has no color at all. Almost unbearably white in this setting is

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the marble of the life-size statue placed in one corner of the room. It is Byron's *Venus de Medici* interpreted by a sculptor who has carefully disguised nudity with various ingenious arrangements of long hair, vines, flowers, doves, and drapery which falls in heavy, taffy-like folds about the lower figure.

A daring work of sculpture of the time was John Gibson's "Tinted Venus" of which he writes, "My Venus of Rome is entirely coloured, flesh, eyes, hair and gold ornaments in the head and the apple in her hand." He placed this figure, life size, in a special niche of supposedly classical design, in his house at Bell-Moor, Hampstead Heath, and here he "sat alone and intent" gazing upon the loveliness of this lifelike nakedness (the Victorian was accustomed to *ersatz* in this as in many other matters) until "she seemed like a celestial spirit" to him. (The Duke of Wellington could not rest, when he saw this statue, until he had a copy of it—what was Canova's heroic-sized statue of Napoleon at the head of his stairway in comparison? But the jealous sculptor would not share his "celestial spirit," and the Duke had to be content with a "Pandora" which, though well tinted, was somewhat of a disappointment. Life had become too much like the "Pandora" legend to make the Greek heroine attractive to Wellington—London was full of wags who would not pass up the chance to ask what was in the lady's mysterious box; the Reform Bill? Or perhaps Wellington's sword that he had bared before the working people of Birmingham when they had clamored for their rights).

The house of the prosperous man of affairs of the fifties and sixties is more than a place to live in; it is his safety deposit vault of the symbols of respectability, necessary insignia to the

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man who has risen out of that great army of people to whom the new technical developments have brought both opportunity and ruin. Because he has had a thicker neck and a tougher heart than most he is on top.

He has married forever; and the great numbers of material objects he has crammed into his house were fashioned to last almost as long. In his library after breakfast he sits in an easy chair with a high, round back (like the one in *Alice's* great adventure out of the Victorian house into a world no more fantastic) reading his morning paper. (It is *The Morning Post*, the gentleman's paper.) In the window behind him, blocking out what light may streak in through the lace curtains, is a cast-iron bust, painted to look like bronze, of Shakespeare, the lower part of which is encircled by a laurel wreath into which a quill pen is stuck. The bust stands on a pedestal of imitation marble. (Shakespeare, in spite of the pointed beard and the ruff, looks something less than Elizabethan.) On the wall between the large doors painted mustard color with rounded panels "picked out" with chocolate color and dark red, is a steel engraving, after Winterhalter, of The Royal Family. The engraving, broader than it is long, is in a frame longer than it is broad, with shaped top and bottom. (The irregular areas of white thus produced by the frame, and the mat that surrounds the engraving, are the kind of effect that appeals to the taste of the time; it has, it would be argued, variety.)

On either side of the mantelpiece of black marble, are steel engravings of Landseer's popular paintings, *Dignity and Impudence*, and *The Monarch of the Glen*. Animals are an ennobling influence, and the Victorian cannot have too many

animal subjects in his art. (The nineteenth century which produced both had its Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals before it established the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children!)

This is a room of deep shadows and sharp angles where mas-



Victorian bedroom with prie-dieu, animal skin rug  
and Wilton carpet

sive pieces of furniture have been placed in self-conscious groups in readiness for serious conversations between men of affairs—pieces upon which no one ever sits. The books behind glass in the shelves of varnished oak, in their bindings of imitation morocco with gilded and incised decorations of vines and leaves, have the musty smell of volumes never opened.

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It is over twenty years since the man of affairs was a man of Merrie England in corduroy breeches and a loose, linen blouse, who could drink a prodigious quantity of strong English ale, and who danced all night at the Greenwich Fair at Easter time, and charged about in the Kissing Rings, and grabbed the plump girls with "cabbage-rosy cheeks," letting them jab him in the back with The-Fun-Of-The-Fair—which creaked like a rusty gate-hinge—that he might hold them, two at a time, by their thick waists while they laughed up hotly in his face. He is bulbous and bulgy now in his tight, respectable clothes; a cartoon John Bull of a man. But with his little quick blue eyes, and his jutting nose, and broad forehead, and full though compressed lips, encircled by a bristling fringe of black beard, there is nothing funny about him. Experience has beaten out all the soft spots; he is tough and hard right through. And a man who has learned the dangerous nineteenth-century secret that money will make money.

He is the father of nine or ten children; three or four of his children will have died, of cholera or typhoid fever—all the padding of this house has not been able to keep the enemies out. Most of the poems the many women poets of the time write are about either lost love, or dead infants. Now and then he cuts out the latter type of poem from newspapers and magazines. He has had one of them hand-printed on imitation parchment; it sits now on his desk in a hand-painted frame of satin decorated with forget-me-nots, hearts and roses. Now and then after a heavy dinner he reads it—"God in his wisdom calls the little ones to him because they are too pure for this earth." Tears trickle down his face then like sap from a healthy tree.



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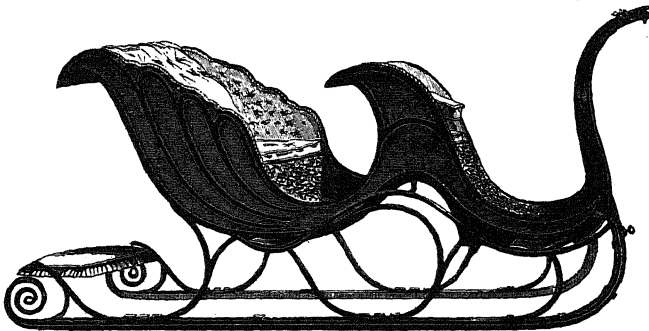
But when he sits at the council table to discuss a bill for sanitation improvements he gets purple over his black stock denouncing these newfangled ideas. The idea that there could be any possible connection between the death of his children and the living conditions of the poor would seem preposterous to him. Cities are bound to be dirty, he argues. (And where did the gentlemen think the money was coming from?) A little dirt never hurt any one. Look at him! He was carried down into the mines by his father when he was almost too little to walk, to work seven hours a day; or he had been hired to sit in the dirt at the age of four, an infant human scarecrow waving the birds out of the fields; he had slept in a room with fifteen or twenty people with all but one window boarded up because of the Window Tax; he had fought, as soon as he learned to walk, for water at the tenement's only tap; and until he was twenty he never knew what it was to have a bath. And let the gentlemen look at him; does he look any the worse for it?

In a few moments now he will get on his horse to ride down to his office. There is a fine rain and the London street will be covered with ankle-deep mud, like thick chocolate icing. His horse, before he mounts, paws at it in irritation, and when they ride away the horse keeps clear of the great Percherons and Clydesdales pulling at the heavy wagons, sending up muddy streams on either side. The crinolined figures, showing white stocking legs, clump along in pattens. On the meaner streets there are no stockings and no pattens below the crinolines; the bare red legs and feet of the women go staunchly through the black ooze. (Shoes are for fair weather.)

The man on the horse believes it is all for the best. God sends

the rain and it turns to mud in the sooty air of the London street; is that any one's fault? Why interfere with the workings of God and Nature? Have any of their harum-scarum ideas proved of any worth? Didn't they get their way in the question of gas-lights for the city streets? And what good did it do them? Now the thieves find it easy to make their way about the streets at night, where before, when it was too dark for them to see where they were going, they kept to their holes.

One's course is clearly marked: to make all the money one can, and leave the rest to Divine Providence.



From "The Art-Journal Illustrated Catalogue"

A sleigh designed by J. J. Saurin of Quebec  
*"'Sleighbing,' as it is termed, forms one of the principal amusements of the Canadians of all ranks"*

## INDIGO AND ONIONS

WHEN Prince Albert was turning over in his mind the idea for a great international industrial exhibition that would establish a standard for British taste, the germ of an opposing taste was developing in the minds of several young Englishmen. At the Royal Academy, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais and Holman Hunt were laying plans for their famous movement designed to free art from academic tyranny, and to bring back the vitality of "nature" into a world dominated by the salon "machine." The dynasty of a great past, only too well known, was to be overthrown in favor of a Golden Age that had about it the romantic haziness of the unknown. (To the three original Pre-Raphaelites the gap between classic Greece and the cinque-cento was a golden fairyland in which the massive form of Giotto rose like a friendly genie, while Fra Angelico smiled beguilingly, and shining lesser figures beckoned in gentle invitation.)

Into an age that had taken to itself the charmingly human vagaries of the Baroque style, Ruskin's "Stones of Venice," with its stimulating chapter on Gothic, had burst with the glory of one of Turner's sunsets; to one young man it was an inspiring textbook which now made everything he saw about him appear as so much rubbish—the sooner cleared away the better. William Morris, born into a well-to-do family three years be-

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fore Victoria's accession to the throne, found the world a beautiful place to be in, full of blue and gold, of the lovely sounds that words make, of stirring black letters against a white page, of flowering vines, and bright birds, and the soft feel of silks and velvets against the finger tips; and, with the eyes closed, the visions of tall men in armor, and tall women in kirtles who had full, red lips, the manners of doves and the hearts of eagles. A beautiful world—only no one seemed to be living in it.

Where were they going, these fellow-Victorians? What were they doing with all this industriousness that kept piling up ever more hideousness between themselves and the beautiful world? He must get himself to a monastery (preferably one of his own founding) in order to capture the glory of Gothic; or should he set out to re-create it in the heart of London?

He solved the problem by creating for himself a medieval setting after his heart's desire at Number 17, Red Lion Square, an "earthly paradise" of English oak and wrought iron, and sumptuous stuffs, a setting in which the furniture forms were honestly rectilinear with elements of function exposed, while the painted pictorial decorations, borrowed from the days of chivalry, were confined to unfunctional surfaces. The average Victorian would have found it all quite impossible—too ecclesiastical for a home, and too pagan for a church. There was faith, and courage, and loving labor in it; but it did not contain the explosive elements necessary to blow the accepted, mid-nineteenth century interior to bits. Even Morris could have seen that.

Here, in his first practical essay into the field of the minor arts, as in his Socialism, which was to come later, there was



*After the painting by W. Holman Hunt, owned by Sir A. H. Fairbairn, Bart.*

### **"The Awakened Conscience"**

An example of Victorian story-telling art in which English artists excelled

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"more lament for the past than a definite program for the future." Morris, in the late fifties, struggling in the midst of Victorian stuffiness, was like some robust Highlander who finds himself confined in an over-heated house of pretentious luxury; he flings open the windows and breathes more heavily than is necessary, making a great noise about it; he stamps about and shouts, and throws things that get in his way (Morris, in his rages, threw anything that came to his hand) but with all his exertions he really accomplishes very little in the way of changing the surroundings.

Morris, with the energy of ten Highlanders, to which was added the intensity of his convictions, the force of his personality, and the lovable quality that made people want to call him "Topsy" and "Top," did, after he had shouted and stamped and hurled things long enough, attract attention to his ideas and plans. Burne-Jones listened to what he was saying; Holman Hunt, Ford Madox Brown and Philip Webb, Walter Crane and other artists pricked up their ears.

He was the perfect type of the-man-who-makes. (It was his boast that no workman in his employ could be asked to do a job of work that he, himself, was not capable of doing.) If he was nostalgic for a past that could never again be captured—a past, perhaps, that had never been—he was, nevertheless, a designer with sound ideas, a craftsman according to his own lofty conception of the word. "Handicraftsmen are the only group in civilization who are really happy," he said to a group of Birmingham workmen, "because in their daily work they experience their greatest pleasure."

With streaks of his beloved indigo in his hair, his breath



The crinoline reached its highest peak of artificiality and boldness of design during the late fifties

*At the top, right: a fashion created for the Empress Eugénie. Bottom, left: a young girl's dress*

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strong with the onions he ate in quantities because he believed there was some classic virtue in them—fitting food for warriors—Morris worked to translate the golden sagas of his dreams, and to set down his boyishly fresh observation of natural forms, in designs that would bring a new spirit into prevailing interiors that were “costly and hideous, or cheap and hideous.”

By 1859 he had gathered about him enough men who believed in him to set himself up as a professional decorator. From the house at Upton, Bexley Heath, the celebrated Red House, he issued his prospectus in which he told the public what it needed—and that what it needed he was prepared to give. His firm of artists, designers and craftsmen, he announced, was prepared to undertake any kind of decoration: murals, architectural carving, stained glass made in the medieval manner, textiles, painted tiles, furniture, “depending either for its beauty on its own design, or the application of materials hitherto overlooked, or on its conjunction with figure and pattern painting”; as well as jewelry, and “every kind of object of domestic use.” The firm, he said, being a co-operative group of thoroughly trained artists, would be able to produce efficiently—unlike other such attempts in the past that had been “crude and fragmentary”—and would give to the public works of “art beauty” in which there would be “the luxury of taste, without the luxury of costliness.” (Morris’ prose at all times has a “hand-made” quality, but the reader is made to wonder at times if perhaps so many onions had been good for him.)

He hardly could have expected his prospectus to bring the victorias, broughams and coupés rushing to his door with orders that would keep him up all night, like another Chippendale;



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and neither crowds nor heavy orders came. The factories of the Midlands kept on supplying the demand as if no William Morris had set himself up as a rival, turning out what the people had come to want; factory lots of the heavy, carved mahogany and rosewood furniture with its castors and its "fallacious springs," the cabinets proudly fitted with heavy plate glass doors, and other pieces with marble tops heavy enough to support an arch; the indispensable ottomans, covered with gaudy brocade and trimmed with long fringe, both the oversized footstool types, and the imposing six-sided ones designed to occupy the center of the room; the carpets in which good Yorkshire wool and vegetable dyes were defiled by being made to serve designs that had only one merit—they were practical, since they did not show spots or signs of wear; the wall papers with gilded stripes, or fleur-de-lis, or geometrical spottings, on white, watered grounds; or the flock papers that imitated velvet, silk and brocade, in rich, angry reds, maroon and sage-green; or the papers that imitated ornamental leather in a variety of stamped patterns remotely descended from models that were losing their freshness when Mahomet set out to convert the world to Islam.

At Hughenden, in Buckinghamshire, Benjamin Disraeli, not yet the Earl of Beaconsfield, but still the Endymion in love with a world that contained royalty, diamonds, titles, perfume and Benjamin Disraeli, continued to live in a heaven of gilt and bright yellow satin, marble intarsia and elaborate marquetry that only he and his chambermaids could have admired. While the neo-Gothic settings called forth by the Pugins' Scarisbrick Hall in Lancashire, with their massive Gothic carv-

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ings, and furniture that had a perverse trick of curling up now and then into the Baroque, were still being cherished by owners perfectly aloof from Morris' cries in the wilderness.

Morris, however, went on working. He was patient, with the craftsman's patience that knows how to shed all things that do not concern the work on hand, that knows the evil imp that resides in matter, that can wait, repeat, or do over again until the job is accomplished. And he was forever studying. In this age that so confidently, and at times with such a deliberate ponderousness of self-assurance that it carries conviction, made its mixed marriages of styles, its esthetic spirit always wavering between the cathedral and the toyshop, Morris was humble and hesitant. He patiently spelled out the secret of Oriental applied design, and in his wallpapers and carpets he used what he had learned; the flower form must be given as if it were a pressed flower, with its color kept almost as in life, but its shape flattened. In carpets, he said, the design should be quite flat, "with no more than a hint of one plane behind another."

Patient and studious: when he had had more than fifteen years' experience he was still anxious to perfect himself in his work and went to Staffordshire to study methods of dyeing that he might improve his textiles.

From the late fifties to 1896, the year of his death, Morris battled with his contemporaries—for their own good. From all sides, and with an astonishing variety of ammunition, he bombarded the fortress of middle-class taste. "In such evil times," he said, "beauty has given place to whim, imagination to extravagance, nature to sick, nightmare fancies, and finally work-

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manlike considerate skill, which refuses to allow either the brain or the head to be overtaxed, . . . has given place to commercial trickery sustained by laborious botching."

"Don't be dragooned into having a pattern simply because it is a pattern," he told a group of workingmen students. Bad art, he said, produced by "degrading labor," would poison everyone sooner or later. "Shifty" and clever French designers who supplied the rush orders of patterns for the Manchester calico mills sometimes went mad, he warned, in racking their brains for new ways to be "shifty" and clever.

The esthetic joy Ruskin was determined to take from the lives of the Victorian bourgeoisie—the critical giant of the sixties and seventies was like a Jehovah calling down damnation upon all who dared to enjoy what they liked without thinking whether it had a *moral* or not—Morris was determined to give to the workingman.

"In a duly ordered community," he wrote, "work should be made attractive by the consciousness of usefulness, by its being carried out with intelligent interest and variety, and by its being exercised in pleasurable surroundings." By pleasurable surroundings, Morris evidently intended shady old gardens, or deep orchards, the reassuring presence of hand-hewn rafters, wrought iron, hand-dyed homespuns, a comradely spirit—and weekly lectures on the good, the beautiful and the true.

(One wonders what the author of "News From Nowhere" would have thought of the thoroughly modern factory with its concrete and steel and structural glass, where the work is carried out with the precision and tension of a warship crew in action. The creator of Utopias would miss the medieval ma-

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materials of wood and iron—steel is the ghost of iron—and perhaps in the intelligent interest of the workers he would find too great an element of strain, but the comradely spirit, at least the tolerance and humor that comes from shared work, that he would surely find.)

When Morris, on the platform, got into his stride, he was an irresistible speaker. Ruskin said of him that he was “beaten gold.” To his listeners it must have been as if gold were melting before them. “You felt when you heard him,” Cunningham-Graham wrote, “this man is right, although you half suspected he was wrong.” The Victorian bourgeoisie who listened to him may have had an inner conviction that he was right, but as far as they were concerned, he might as well have been wrong.

Why go mooning about in Mr. Morris’ Utopias when one’s own day was so much more interesting? The average Victorian, in spite of his deep-seated Toryism, was, nevertheless, perfectly conscious of the excitement to be had from “living in the modern world.” (Perhaps one of the pleasantest of illusions.) His world was full of wonderful newness. Science had not yet had time to become commonplace to him; the inventions that define the modern world today, although in the first stages of development, were magical to him in a degree such as we cannot know. The man born into a world of stage-coaches who took his first ride in a coach drawn by a locomotive at thirty miles an hour would surely experience a sense of wonder in speed impossible to the airplane pilot of today, no matter what his record. Turner’s “Rain, Steam and Speed,” an expression of excitement, shows a Victorian “clipper” that

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could not have made more than forty miles an hour. In 1856, Hawthorne writes that one of the most important incidents of a visit to Oxford was being photographed in a group by Mr. de la Motte who "stained the glass with our figures and faces in the twinkling of an eye." Two of the women turned their faces away, "refusing to countenance the proceedings." (Did these Victorian ladies agree in their hearts with the savages who look upon the camera as an instrument of black magic that will, in taking the likeness, steal the soul?)

Even Tennyson, who was for the middle-class "The Poet, as Victoria was The Queen," whose volumes could be safely left on any parlor table, and who could be counted upon to express prevailing platitudes in elegant verse approved by Royalty itself, even he wrote his "Locksley Hall" with its vision of a future "Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World" (this was in 1842!), and its far more prophetic vision in which he

"Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained  
a ghostly dew

From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central  
blue."

A world full of wonderful newness; but the faster Science moved, the slower the average Victorians determined to be in following after. They had their own system of checks and balances, and did not need to be told what to do by any creators of backward-looking, or forward-looking Utopias. Where would they be if they listened to all the men who hammered at them with crazy ideas? There were the men who tried to

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convince them that their ancestors were monkeys; not only those of the meanest crossing sweeper, or match boy or sewer salvager, but even those of the Archbishop of Canterbury, even of Victoria herself! It was too much. There were those who advocated the use of the drug that Miss Nightingale had used to help the poor soldiers in the Crimean War—which was only humane, but why urge that chloroform be used as a general pain-killer? What were these gentlemen thinking of who would have innocent young girls helplessly drugged in the dentist's chair, and at his mercy; who would have chloroform used even in child-birth which would not only necessitate the immodesty of having men in the room of labor but would deprive every Christian mother of the God-given right to suffer in the sacred act of giving life. And there was the man who had said that before the century was out people would be communicating with each other at great distances by means of a talking telegraph apparatus. Why should any one want to talk to any one else over a great distance when, now that they had the telegraph, any important message could be sent in that way? And what would become of the mounted messengers and the page boys? More labor problems on their hands. And it was appalling to think of the frauds that could be perpetrated when a man could reach another by his voice without ever having to show his face! (In 1878, Professor Bell came to Buckingham Palace with his telephone and explained its use to Victoria who had the delight of listening through it to a Miss Kate Field, all the way out at Osborne Cottage, on the Isle of Wight, singing *The Cuckoo Song*, *Kathleen Mavourneen* and *Comin' Through the Rye*.)

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It might not be quite clear to them exactly where Mr. Morris' ideas were leading (in the Trafalgar Square riots of 1881, when Morris and his Socialist workingmen battled with the police, they may have got an inkling); but to every right-minded citizen there was obviously some connection between Mr. Morris' pleasant birds perched on trellises, his wall decorations, and hand-made curtains and rugs with their delicate flower and fruit designs, and the revolutionary forces that were altering the frontiers of Europe, filling London with wild-eyed men who talked about the rights of the workingman to the fruits of his labor (in this scepter'd isle set in the silver sea of industrialism!) and the downfall of monarchies—right under Victoria's majestic nose!

Bourgeois Victorian England might now and then "paper a room in Morris," as it might now and then listen to what the cranks had to say, but all this did not, in the end, make so very much difference. It stood its ground.

So did William Morris. Morris & Company, in spite of all obstacles, produced its work according to its prospectus. A certain compromise is indicated by the fact that in later productions designs were more elaborate than in earlier ones. (Morris became sole owner of the firm in 1875, and under his name it still operates today in London where many of the original designs of Morris and others are preserved.) In place of the wallpapers of imitation tooled leathers, of imitation textiles, the debased Renaissance geometrical patterns, or the realistic scenic papers with figures, used for dados, Morris & Company offered their carefully designed patterns in which the aim was not to reproduce nature, but to bring to the indoors

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enough suggestion of natural forms to give a sense of lightness and liberation. When the manufacturers were presenting to the public such creations as the "Landseer sideboard," a massive piece in which "The Stag at Bay," "Bolton Abbey" and fourteen other popular paintings by Landseer were reproduced in carving in high relief, Morris & Company attempted to return to simplicity of construction in which function was exposed, to "eschew" (a favorite word with Morris) turnings, elaborate carvings and moldings, and to go back to the simple trestle table and the plain rush-bottomed chair. (In the sixties and seventies, almost the only furniture of simple design in the English house was to be found in the kitchens and service rooms where the old Jacobean settles, oak tables and Windsor chairs were still in use.)

Morris never called a truce in his battle to bring beauty and light to Victorian England. With the Gothic chapter of "The Stones of Venice" ringing in his head, he organized his "Anti-Scrape" to protect ancient buildings from the "restorations" of the new-Vandals. He designed stained-glass windows for a chapel in Christ Church, Oxford. With Madox Brown and Burne-Jones, he designed ecclesiastical stained glass and embroidered altar cloths. He painted frescoes. In several private houses he designed handsome wall decorations. He decorated the Throne Room of St. James's Palace. He set up the Kelmscott Press (for a time Rossetti was an associate with the press) and printed books, many of them his own, in bold Gothic letters beautiful to look at and difficult to read. He decorated the dining room of the South Kensington Museum. The upper walls had floral decorations in plaster and were painted a soft,



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gray green (besides indigo, Morris liked the colors used by the romantic-classicists—mistletoe-green, duck's-egg green, rose-amber, pomegranate). Burne-Jones painted the lower panels of this refreshment room; this was in 1867, seventeen years before he painted his *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, one of the most reproduced paintings of the late nineteenth century.

Morris designed many of his beautiful Gothic letter founts. He organized exhibitions of Morris & Company's work. He wrote his books and poems, and made voyages to Iceland and came home and published translations from the Icelandic. He allowed his wife to pose again and again to the madman, Rossetti, who did not like him and who was always falling in love, ethereally but obstreperously. He lectured, storming at the mighty, wheedling, instructing and hypnotizing the young; while, for the workingman, he pulled out all the stops, hoping that by sheer magnetism he might create the enchanted circle in which the gifted and the plodding meet as one. In the year of his death he was raging, as full of fire as ever, against the abuses of public advertising, and organized a commission to check the growing invasion of signboards in such pastoral English scenes as were immortalized by Constable.

Considering his prodigious labor, and his passionate propagandizing, Morris' influence was not great. Yet it would have been impossible to live in the same age with him and ignore him. He was felt as Vesuvius is in the vicinity of the Bay of Naples. The London County Council of the last years of the nineteenth century owed many of its best ideas to William Morris. The "garden cities" that sprang up in the latter part

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of the century—oases created for those who were feeling the pressure of industrialism in the city, and who were yet tied to it for economic reasons—were inspired by his attempts to make small, self-supporting centers where industry, good living and “art beauty” went hand in hand.

Liberty & Company owed much to Morris’ crusade for fine textiles; while in Scandinavia his work in handicrafts was undoubtedly an influence in the revival of the national folk arts which has developed one of the soundest and most vital forces in modern design.

Of the English designers sympathetic with his aims, Morris had at least one direct disciple of fine talent. This was Ernest Gimson, the architect of a handful of buildings who designed furniture in the spirit of the great English craftsmen, but in a purely individual style. His furniture reveals that there might have been a natural continuation of eighteenth-century work, but for the great—and in spite of all, unaccountable—stampede of taste that occurred in the Victorian era.

## FRIAR EASTLAKE'S GROCERY GOTHIC

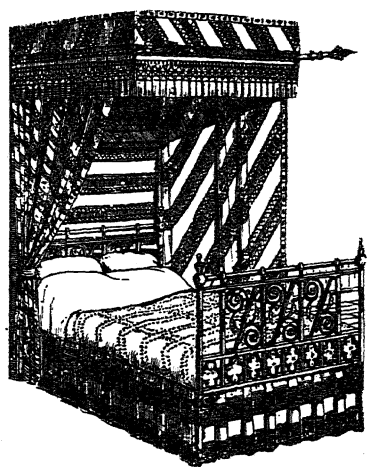
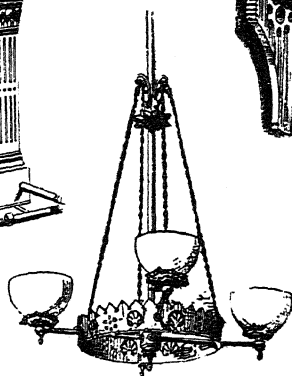
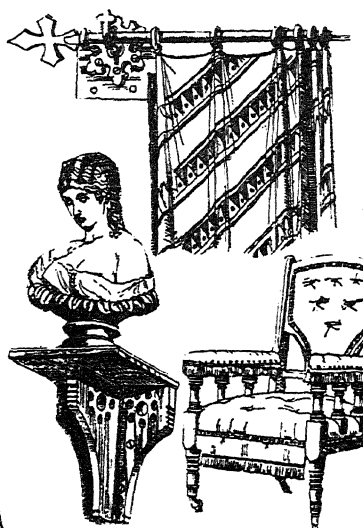
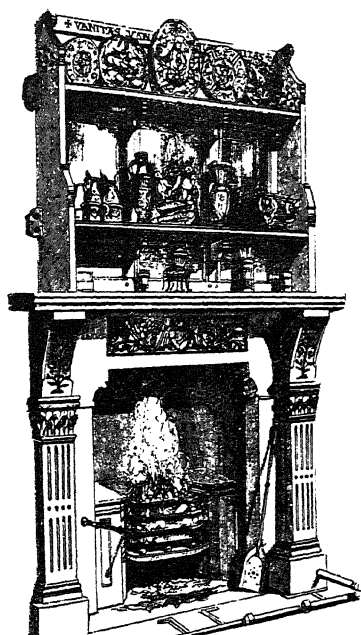
CHARLES LOCKE EASTLAKE did not give it a name. Now it seemed to be Gothic that he was urging upon his contemporaries; and then again it was Tudor as he expressed it in designs translated from the early experiments in upholstered luxury created for the Sackvilles at Knole. "Art furniture" was the nearest he would come to a label for what he felt ought to be adopted by his fellow-Victorians. Whatever Eastlake's style was, he struck fire with his public, and by 1878 when his "Hints on Household Taste" had run into many editions, including six in America, house owners, because of him, were taking stock of themselves and their surroundings. Ruskin, William Morris, Rossetti, and others had pointed out to them their sins in taste, but it was Charles Eastlake who really caught their attention. As one normal, wholesome individual addressing another of his kind in a friendly chat on house-cleaning matters, they accepted him and the "Hints" with perfect faith. In spite of the excellent designs of Morris and his firm, in spite of the designs of Robert W. Edis and other architects, they began, during the seventies and eighties, indiscriminately calling "Eastlake" all designs that were "unlike any objects in ordinary use." (After the turn of the century, when forms of the immediately preceding per-

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iod were repudiated—as they always are—the tag of “Eastlake” was still given to designs only remotely connected with him, but now it was an epithet of scorn.)

After the appearance of the celebrated “Hints,” “artistic” and “inartistic” became working words in the bourgeois vocabulary. Prospective brides were given the volume as the credo of a new religion. They looked about at the familiar surroundings in the light of its revelation and saw that they had been living in a dark age. It must all be done away with; those illegitimate descendants of the Louis XV chair, covered in Utrecht velvet or haircloth, which wore with a self-satisfied air their mixture of royal blood and bad manners, which were so demure from the front with their daintily curved legs, but which kicked out disgracefully in the back with a kind of illogical grace that once had seemed a part of their charm. “Cromwell-Eastlake” chairs must now stand in their places. Those brass curtain poles, with enormous flowers in brass, bronze or china at their ends, from which the heavy velvet and satin draperies hung down and trailed upon the floor, looped up about half-way like theatre curtains, and held in place by other huge flowers; they must now make way for wrought-iron poles with imposing spearhead finials, and “art” curtains with broad, horizontal bands bordered with some good, conservative pattern like the Greek key, or curtains with diagonal stripes in “Roman” colors—or better still, Mr. Eastlake’s exceedingly “artistic” curtains of horse-girths bordered with bands of velvet. And, in order to keep out the daylight (still a vulgar thing) stained-glass windows were imperative.

The flowers and fruit of tinted shell, painted wax or dyed



"That remarkable style known as Eastlake"

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feathers, once so handsome in the parlor under their glass cases, must now go, and with them the coal- and wood-boxes painted with roses and morning-glories, or with photographs of the Coliseum of Rome shellacked on the lids. Instead of the large casts in plaster and iron, of busts of famous authors and musicians, that were once thought so distinguished in the library, there must now be casts of sculpture by Michelangelo or Canova, or gilded, cast-iron statuettes of knights in armor, or "The Dying Gladiator," or "Clytie," in plaster, growing full-bosomed—but oh, so pure!—from her encircling sunflower petals. The red and white Bohemian glass, once so cheery with its look of refined revelry, seems tawdry now that Mr. Whistler has pointed out the superior artistic qualities of Oriental blue and white. Even Mr. Landseer's noble animals, as worked out at home in orange and blue wools for the hearth-rug, have lost their appeal; as have the English "Aubussons," with their superlative roses and scrolls, the medallioned "Hohenzollerns" that imitated them, and the Axminsters with their vegetation and bowknots, and the Wiltons with their ferns and mosses—or their spectacular water lilies inspired by the fabulous Victoria Regia of the old days. Carpets must now be more discreetly designed (any English artist could surely outdo the lowly Persian, Indian and Turk when it came to good "Oriental" design) and the old practice of covering every inch of space on a floor with a sewn carpet is now barbarous in the light of a new day which calls for smaller floor coverings that will leave a parquet border around the walls.

And, now that "a proper artistic sprit" was entering into their lives, home owners were beginning to see that it was only

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fitting that there should be something done about the front entrance hall. Nothing could be better for this place than a dado and flooring of Mr. Eastlake's encaustic tiles, preferably in two shades of brown, or in brown with Indian red, set in a purely classic pattern befitting the formal architectural character of the apartment. (The elder Pugin is credited with having introduced the enameled "Dutch" tile into Victorian England. But tiles were also used by Sir Charles Barry in the first years of Victoria's reign for the entrance hall of the Reform Club. Barry also used them in the "new" Houses of Parliament, completed in the forties. From that time on the Minton factories were busy producing tiles, both enameled and encaustic.) "Tiles are so beautiful to look upon," writes an art critic of the late seventies, "they are so durable, and so cleanly, that it is not to be wondered at that their use has been adapted to almost every scheme of domestic decoration. They will harmonise with any style. They form the leading feature in decorative chimney pieces, and can be combined as dadoses with mural painting of the highest order."

In the tiles before the door, Eastlake suggests, the old Roman greeting of "Cave Canum" would be appropriate. (Surely a friendly legend for the entrance of any home, and far more appropriate than Mr. Landseer's cosy St. Bernard on the door mat.) Or the simple work "Salve" would lend an air of hospitality as well as of distinction.

Eastlake found the typical well-to-do middle-class interior a place of respectably subdued flamboyance where one sat upright on one's chair—for fear of disturbing the "tidy" or antimacassar put there so that your oiled ringlets would not

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contaminate the upholstery—while the surroundings performed a bacchic dance of reeling curves and syncopated color schemes; he attempted to transform it into an interior where lines had a packing-box straightness, with decorative details borrowed from the Renaissance and the late Gothic.

What was Eastlake's "Gothic" that did so much to upset the complacency of the prosperous wholesale grocer, the producers of patent medicines and "health foods," and the owners of "emporiums" who were joining the colonies of the respectably elegant in Bayswater, Clapham, Fulham, Barnsbury and Brompton? The Pugins and Sir Charles Barry were responsible for the nineteenth-century swing back to Gothic. They had approached it in a spirit of reverential architectural pedantry which did not, however, escape the solemn sense of the illogical, characteristic of their own time. Eastlake was as far from them as he was from the creators of the eighteenth-century Fonthill Abbey and Strawberry Hill who had dallied shamelessly with the hallowed style. He was also not in tune with the brilliant frivolities of Chippendale, Ince, and Mayhew, who had used Gothic decorated arches and fretwork for furniture designs. And he would have considered it beneath him to recognize the legitimacy of the Victorian master-work, the "Gothic" chair, with its amazingly drunken legs and its back whose top rose into a pinnacle point, and which was decorated with open-work carvings of pointed arches, and crockets and finials.

Charles Eastlake denied in his preface to the second edition of the "Hints" any leanings towards "Gothic pedantry." It was the spirit of the old manufacture, he said, that he wished



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to revive, not the forms. What he wanted to see in every home, —since they ought to be produced in sufficient numbers to bring down the cost to the average family's means—was the old "oaken" settle of early Tudor times, rectilinear chairs with straight, plain stretchers, and solid oak tables with good bulbous legs (was this not England where the insidious feminine curves of the Baroque were decadent and alien?) and towering court-cupboards modified for "modern" times, with plenty of carving and plenty of shelves for the display of china. If more luxurious furniture were appropriate he would have ebonized cabinets with panels of old needlework. He would also have many little wall cabinets and brackets for vases, statuettes, or small pictures. The old Renaissance chimney piece that had been a kind of altar to the family gods he would also see revived, a lofty, architectural structure that would make a baronial hall of even the most modest room.

Eastlake's favorite decorative details were the Gothic trefoil and quatrefoil, carved arcading, and an individual form of crocket and finial; he also used horizontal ribbed molding and a design formed by a series of holes in a circle. He had a passion for medieval ironwork and believed that function should not only be exposed but stressed; the Victorian factory-made hinge that hid itself from view (when it was not half-fallen apart) was anathema to him, and his wrought-iron hinges nobly declared their purpose even to the point of dwarfing the piece they were intended to serve. He liked to keep as much as possible the box-like character of his design, and in some cases achieved this by carrying down the sides, or the back, to the floor where he used notches to form the feet, or he joined the

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member to the other parts by a thick and sturdy stretcher.

Eastlake designed textiles, wallpaper, various accessories, metal beds and jewelry as well as furniture. "It is hardly too much to say that fifty years hence," he writes, "all the contents of our modern upholstery shops will have fallen into useless lumber." (In a cold fireless room Eastlake's own furniture would have been an irresistible temptation.) This deplorable state of affairs he tried to correct, to stay, as he puts it, "the progress of bad taste in this century."

Modestly he says in his preface to the second edition of "Hints on Household Taste" (itself a modest title) that he has done no more than "to show his readers how they may furnish their houses in accordance with a sense of the picturesque which shall not interfere with modern notions of comfort and convenience."

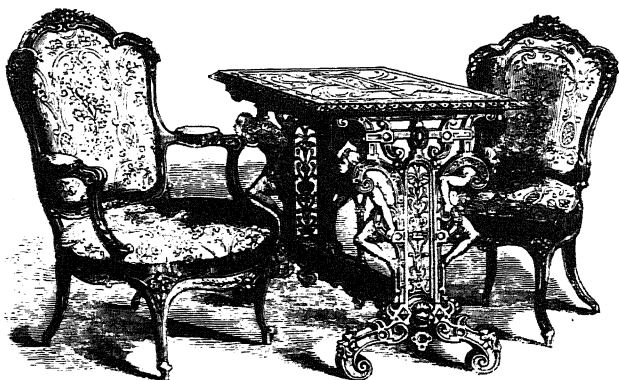
In his "sense of the picturesque" Mr. Eastlake gives himself away as a designer who has chosen to retreat from his age but who has, in spite of himself, taken it along with him. His designs, although often theoretically sound, are tainted with such earnestness for the picturesque that they are almost aggressively unattractive. A reformer's furniture.

Like Morris, Edis, and others who were in sympathy with them, or who imitated them for factory profits, he made the mistake of believing that the only possible future design could have lay in the past. (In the new century Eastlake, not unaware of the possibilities offered by recent inventions and scientific developments, designed electric-light fixtures. But he was bemused and astray in Thomas Edison's alien world. There was, for example, his electric-light fixture in which a bronze cupid,

with chubby arms outstretched, prettily holds a chain of electric-light bulbs, strung like beads on a chain!)

In the chapter on the *Decline of Medieval Art*, Eastlake writes, "The art- historian who, in a future age, shall attempt to describe the various phases of taste through which English painting and architecture [he could well have added "and decoration"] have passed during this century will have no easy task before him." It all forms, he says, "a sort of labyrinth which by and by it will be difficult to survey."

Unquestionably, the good Friar Eastlake, for all his earnestness, good will and industry, made a large contribution, although not entirely of his own creating, to the bewildering convolutions of this incredible and fascinating structure.



From "The Illustrated London News"

Table and chairs by Webb, Bond Street

## CHARIVARI

WHILE Eastlake and other independent designers were issuing their own creations, the manufacturers and "household furnishers" were not losing any time in taking advantage of a rich and constantly growing market. Prince Albert, it was true, was no longer there to give encouragement and guidance by personal inspection tours, but students trained in the Royal Schools of Design, who were being constantly called into industry, helped to preserve his delicate if circumscribed taste. And there was always his image to look at in times of doubt, wearing court dress, and holding the catalogue of the Great Exhibition of 1851 in his hand. (Prince Albert, who had complained about "the artistic monstrosity of most of our monuments," might have foreseen that the one erected to his memory—designed by Sir Gilbert Scott—would be no exception. Having known all along that the nation's tribute to him after his death would be characteristically heavy-handed, well-intentioned and ugly, he might have chosen Sir Gilbert's St. Pancras Station as a worthier tribute. It was completed four years after Albert's death, but he must have seen the plans and realized that they stemmed directly from his beloved Crystal Palace.)

But even without the Prince Consort's stimulus, it was possible, in this inquiring and acquisitive age, to follow the cur-

rents of ideas—always lagging a safe distance behind—and to produce objects that covered as much ground historically and geographically as those of any scene designer for repertory companies.

Victoria was an Empress now—the title had been reluctantly accepted by the people to whom it had an ominous sound, a bringing back of painful memories of an Empire only by luck safely disposed of; besides, it was unEnglish! Only the Oriental Disraeli, with his mind all cloth-of-gold and frangipane, could have thought of such an exotic honor for the Widow of Windsor. But for a people who now belonged, whether they willed it or not, to a great Empire, what could be more appropriate than for them to surround themselves with the things of the allies, and of those strange countries in the Near and Far East into which more and more of the Queen's men were venturing every year, hoisting the Union Jack and imparting to the natives their interesting ideas of mutual glory? (Kipling's "Plain Tales From the Hills" appeared in 1888, giving every Cockney a glow of pride in a country that could produce men who braved jungle, mountain peak and desert without losing or adding an inch of stature, without being shaken in a single conviction.) The expanding Empire gave designers new ideas to play with: Horseshoe arches, Hispano-Moresque vases, mussarabi work, Indian textiles and brasses, Turkish divans and tabourets inlaid with ivory, Arabian mosaics and Persian tiles.

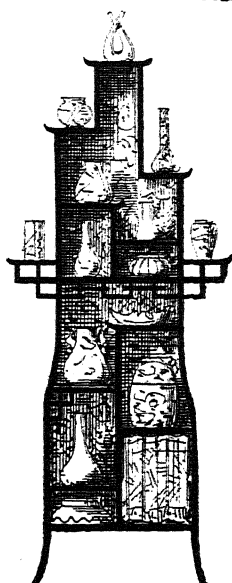
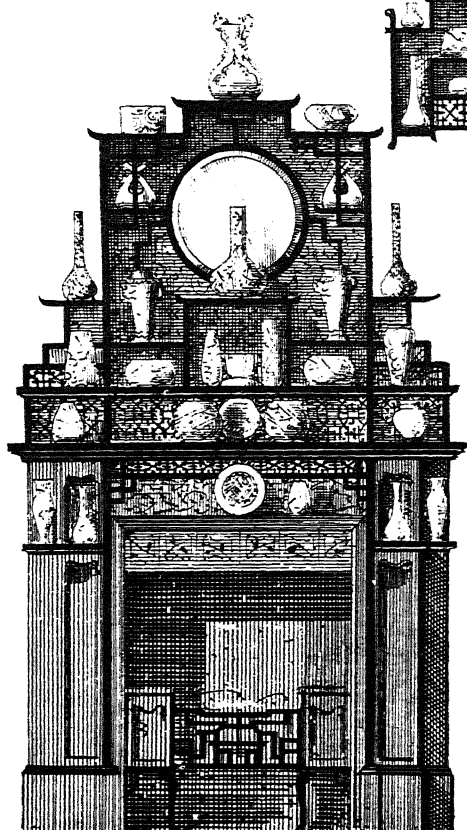
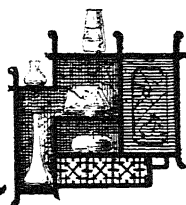
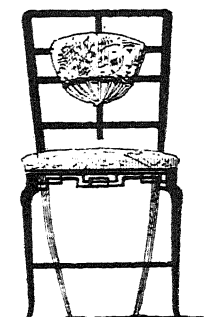
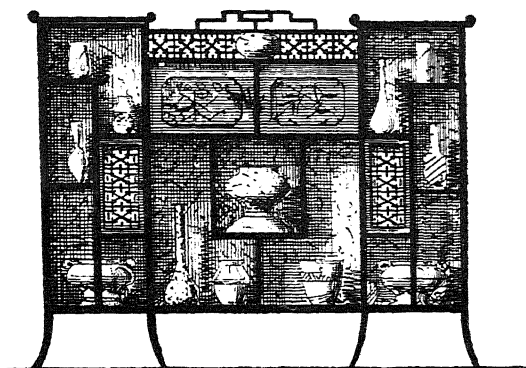
And there was Mr. Whistler, long forgiven as an American, but held in suspicion as an artist, who contributed to the fashion for exotics by praising the Japanese fan. The fact that the

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Japanese fan was admired by Whistler for elements of design almost as difficult for the layman to read as written music is for the non-musical person, never entered the heads of those who now bought Japanese fans, any Japanese fans, for their houses. The Victorians of the seventies and eighties, top-heavy with "esthetical ideas," felt a naïve sense of awe for works of art. For them—like the savage with his belief in sympathetic magic—the characteristics of a work of art could be transmitted by association. If a Japanese fan were artistic, then a Japanese fan in a room would make the room artistic, while ten Japanese fans would make it ten times as artistic.

With a strange instinct for incongruous associations, they chose the Japanese fan as a decoration for the mantelpiece. This was usually a pseudo-Renaissance structure loaded with carving and fitted in the upper part with tiers of shelves about a lofty looking-glass. The precious fans were stuck, with artful carelessness, behind the ceramic collection displayed on the mantelpiece, the Minton "Etruscan" vases, the Wedgwood bowls decorated with John Flaxman's Anglo-Greeks, and the richly colored plates in Hispano-Moresque style.

The Japanese craze developed a hybrid, fancy-dress style known as "Anglo-Japanese" in which Oriental forms and materials were "adapted" without the slightest understanding of their nature or the traditional laws that govern their design. Birmingham and Manchester, never caught dozing when profitable ideas were in the air, filled rush orders for "Anglo-Japanese" carpets, hangings, furniture, ceramics and screens. (Bamboo became popular and was imitated in wood and other materials.) Many of these "Oriental" wares manufactured



*From "The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher," 1881*

Drawing-room furniture in "Anglo-Japanese" style  
Many of the Oriental wares of the Midlands found their way to Japan

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in the Midlands found their way to Japan (The Emperor was a good customer of the British factories) and here they were imitated with that whole-hearted treachery against their own traditions which characterizes small nations, once they have allowed the commercial poison of large nations to interfere with the perfectly wholesome functioning of the native folk-art expression. These imitations of imitations were straight-way shipped off to England, of course, where they were absorbed into the "Anglo-Japanese" style.

The Anglo-Japanese style was reflected in the decoration of many houses in the seventies and eighties, without at all interfering with the expression of other styles equally popular. There was a "Japanese" mantelpiece in a morning room in the house of A. A. Ionides, in Holland Park, that had compartments for over *forty* vases! This house, considered "daring" in the seventies, had Morris papers, and carpets, ceiling decorations in gesso by Walter Crane, and a fireplace designed by Philip Webb. In the dining-room the walls, doors, ceiling and a sideboard were all decorated with panels in Japanese lacquer. There was a series of pictured scenes of *Æsop's Fables*. There was also a bas-relief illustrating the quatrain from Omar Khayyam which begins, "Come Fill the Cup and in the Fire of Spring . . ." (Edward Fitzgerald's adaptation of the Persian poet's work had reached some hidden Oriental spot in the romantic Victorian soul, and from the moment it had appeared in 1859 it had been quoted as an aid to prosaic conversation, set to music to be sung in the back drawing-room, and printed in decorated lettering to hang on the wall.)

A Morris paper in the drawing-room of this much be-dec-



orated house had embossed chrysanthemums overlaid with silver lacquer on a ground of gold and colored lacquer. The ceiling and cornice were lacquered in gold and ivory, and the textiles were Morris indigo-blue and green. This house was one of the first to possess a Tanagra figurine. The Victorians soon took the decadent little Greeks to their hearts. (There was not such a great disparity of spirit between the third-century Greeks, and the Victorians, as one might think.)

Another elaborate house in Holland Park, begun in the seventies, was that of William Burgess, the artist. This house was, said Harriet Martineau, "a treat to the eye, and a lesson to the mind." Burgess himself decorated his house for the most part, and the "artistic" effects were overpoweringly in evidence. There was much use of gilding, stained glass, inlay and mural painting. Tennyson's and Chaucer's poems were the inspiration for most of the murals, and decorated text from their poems also appeared on the walls. The guest's room in this house was entirely of gold, with an unusual gold bed which had the headboard of vellum on which the artist had painted a medieval decoration. The owner's bedroom was the most elaborate of all, with a ceiling of "hearts and darts powdered in longitudinal compartments" and a painted and gilt dressing table with a mosaic top, and a washstand covered with gilt arabesques, with a marble basin inlaid with silver fish.

Many English artists of the last decades of the nineteenth century lived in luxurious houses whose interiors were a source of inspiration to the prosperous tradesmen busy furnishing their own castles. Another artist, W. B. Scott, lived in a house much admired by the bourgeois. This artist was one of the

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first decorators of his time to realize the possibilities of mirrored panels, but his use of them scarcely entitles him to a place of merit as a man ahead of his time. The mirrors were used on a mantelpiece in his main drawing-room where they framed a large oil painting of his own, an *Eve* of highly ornate attractions; there was also, on this structure, the conventional display of Hispano-Moresque ware.

The unpredictable late Victorians! They made their ceilings inordinately high (as a man rose in the world so did his ceiling) and then, in order to bring them down somewhat nearer to the scale of living, they divided the high walls into three sections. There was first the dado that reached to about the level of chair backs—this usually had a narrow border at the top; then there was the large expanse of the wall-covering proper, which was of tooled leather, or its imitation, imitation-Siena marble, a “tapestry” or some other paper, lacquer panels, tiles, paint or matting; above this was the frieze which might be in paper or other material, but always different from that in the other sections, and also much narrower than the dado. Above the frieze there was often a decorated cornice, sometimes of elaborate plaster work in open-work design.

The ceiling was often coved, and elaborately decorated with gesso decorations which were painted or gilded; or the ceiling might be painted with an allegorical scene. False, or sheathed, beams were also used and arranged to form a series of compartments, each of which might receive decorative treatment. In modest houses the ceiling was usually left undecorated except for the elaborate rosette from which hung the chandelier.

In the house of W. B. Scott one of the drawing-rooms had

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a ceiling painted sky-blue—this was to give a naturalistic touch in a room whose walls were covered with panels decorated with “Virginian crimson nightingales.” The ceiling in another room in this house of original ideas was papered—the paper having a floral pattern in Egyptian style. The walls were covered with a tapestry paper above an olive-colored dado; while the frieze was in Moresque design, with motifs described as “the ghosts of plants.”

Wedgwood ceramics used on the ornate cabinets of ebonized wood, and on the mantelpieces, were also arranged in panels for wall decoration. In a Berkeley Square house of the late eighties the walls were paneled with ebonized wood inlaid with amboyna in a floral pattern, heavily gilded; here there were center panels of olive-colored Wedgwood plaques in designs after Flaxman.

Perhaps the peak of “picturesque naturalism” as it was expressed in the houses of artists of the period was reached by Alma-Tadema. This artist, an Anglicized Dutchman, was one of the the most successful painters of the late eighties. His pictures of models looking no less Victorian for their chitons and sandals, posed in backgrounds studiously composed to give an atmosphere of classic Greece, were judged by critics to be examples of high achievement in what one of them described as “this lesser Renaissance of our day.”

In one room of Alma-Tadema’s house the walls, covered with dados of Manilla matting, had a chair-rail design of cockle shells with the name of his wife incorporated in the design. Above this was a cream-colored paper with roses and doves, while the cornice, perhaps the choicest of all the decora-

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tions in this room, was composed of colored Easter eggs. Another room in this artist's house, one that revealed his predilection for classic Greece, had a dado over which was a border of miniature reproductions of the Elgin marbles.

As the rising generation gave every indication of continuing heedlessly on its way, losing all sense of balance and direction, it is not surprising that the elderly, looking back to earlier days when interiors, for all their ill-digested eclecticism, expressed the vitality and self-confidence of their owners, should lament "the good old Victorian style."

In one of his lectures on "Decorating and Furnishing Town Houses," given before the Society of Art in 1880, Robert W. Edis said: "Art-decoration is creating a fashion which is even worse than in the dead days of the earlier part of the nineteenth century." Edis, more practical than Morris, and with a more discriminating taste than Eastlake, was one of the few men of his time who realized that before taste could improve, something like a spiritual bonfire must take place to burn away the impulse to concentrate upon ornamentation which had become so excessive that all ideas of construction were forgotten. He had the good architect's feeling for unity between interior architecture and large, semi-stationary pieces such as wardrobes, washstands, bookcases, sideboards and china cabinets. He attempted, both figuratively and practically, to ventilate the late Victorian house. He saw that the fashion for painted tiles, matting, and the manufactured floor covering, known by the high-sounding name of Kamptulicon, was a sign of improvement so far as getting away from the dust-holding embossed papers and heavy carpets was concerned.

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Yet in his own designs, Edis revealed that he was unable to extricate himself from the welter of turgid ideas that engulfed the taste of his time. In his book, based upon his lectures on decoration, he offers the suggestion of a mantelpiece of painted tiles, or Japanese lacquer, with recesses for ceramics, *lined with red velvet!* In a mantelpiece in his own home he resorted to a characteristically Victorian makeshift when he used a curtain to conceal the entire lower part that contained the fireplace.

The curtain became an important factor in decoration with the later Victorians who, vaguely uneasy about their faulty construction, both in interior architecture and in cabinet making, used it to conceal what they would rather not look at, but what, for some psychological reason, they were unable to change. When the upright piano became fashionable in the last years of the century, they did not like its looks and, in order to improve it, they placed a curtain over the back and faced this towards the room. The dissatisfaction felt by the Victorians for their pianos is rather difficult to understand, considering the superb complacency with which they accepted each new design in their host of "nightmare fancies." As they had never been satisfied with the handsome old square piano of rosewood, ebony, mahogany, or walnut and mahogany veneer, with its good, stout legs and florid carving, so they objected to the design of the upright piano, which they did their best to disguise. When they did not raise the string section into a vertical position on top of the case where, with gilt decorations, it looked almost as beautiful as the harp they so admired, they "improved" the upper part of the front by covering it with

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red or pink silk pleated fan-wise from a center rosette. They also ornamented the music rack with mother-of-pearl inlay, and placed stamped-brass brackets on either side of it. Hanging silk draperies with ball-fringe were also used to "soften its shape," and plants in pottery vases, statuettes, lamps, and photographs in gilt frames were placed on the top. While the plush-covered stool of carved wood, with long fringes made of colored wools and silk wound about wooden cylinders, compensated somewhat, of course, for owning a piano at all. (The critical attitude of the Victorians towards their pianos might be explained by the fact that they realized that here was a prominent, bulky object that could not easily be made to look like something else. It was, in fact, a kind of machine! And, confronted by it, they were confronted with all the machine's cold logic which demands a certain number of parts, no more and no less, in order to accomplish function, and which also demands that the enclosing carcass accommodate itself to the functional forms, and not the other way round.)

Eastlake, in a little book of genial confidences on matters of domestic decoration, signed not with his own name but with a sprightly pseudonym, says of his times that they were "omnivorous in matters of taste." This insatiable appetite for novelties of all kinds—almost always excepting the good—made handsome profits for those professionally interested in supplying the public with materials for what was called "internal decoration." When the wallpapers, carpets, textiles and furniture of William Morris were admired, the manufacturers set their designers to imitating Morris. When they scented a

reaction from the austerities of Morris, and of others who designed "art furniture," they went abroad for ideas and created "Frenchified" fashions which were eagerly bought and placed in settings it was hoped they would enliven.

These "pinky frivolities," which were introduced in the seventies and eighties, and which helped to usher in the Edwardian style in its Grand Hotel phase, included a number of unusual pieces. There was for example, the rickety little chair, whose back was all spindles and balls. It was usually gilded. Its seat was sometimes caned, and used with a cushion fastened on with ribbons, or it had an upholstered seat with fringe, and a plush top rail. This chair became exceedingly popular and was placed, for the sake of variety, in rooms that held Eastlake's "Cromwell" chairs, heavily turned Tudor chairs, and Italian Renaissance chairs with carved backs, and the ever-present over-stuffed chairs covered in plush, satin, brocade, tapestry or needlework. There was also among these designs created from imported ideas the sofa of cerise velvet trimmed with swags of long fringe. The low, luxuriously undulating "Pascha" chair, covered with strips of tapestry and velvet, was also considered extremely "recherché" at this time. This chair was designed primarily for rooms in the "Turkish" style. (Turkish and "Moresque" rooms were popular as well as rooms in Japanese style. In restricted form, these styles survived in the "cosy-corner" which became a domestic necessity at the close of the century.) There were also sofas and chairs in "sets" covered with velvet hand-painted in floral designs.

In the nineties a gilt Marie-Antoinette chair was sought after as "a good model of that style whose development the

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cultivated patronage of the ill-fated Marie-Antoinette did so much to foster." As a companion-piece this little chair had a tall, narrow jardinière of gilded bamboo, with the top and a low shelf covered in plush; from these there hung fringes of silk net trimmed with silk tassels, and silk tassels were fastened with cords at intervals along the legs—a piece described as "a delight to the fair sex." There were other flower stands of electro-gilt metal with colored marble tops. Imitation Boulle cabinets and *bonheur-du-jour* were also welcomed into interiors whose strict fidelity to the creeds of the "art decorators" had begun to weary their owners.

But of all the objects created in defiance of the aspiring reformers perhaps the most original was the cabinet made entirely of scarlet plush, decorated with stamped brass, and hand-painted in oil. Yet there were others that might compete with it; for example, the easel of plush decorated with swags of silk, pendant gold cords and tassels. There was also the stand for a potted palm which consisted of a platform and tub, both covered in scarlet machine-embroidered plush!

In all the vertiginous array of nineteenth-century objects there appeared a type of furniture that was designed on sound principles without an element that could be dispensed with; this was the bent-wood furniture originally produced by the Austrian firm, Thonet. At its best it was simple, compact, neat and light and entirely adequate for ordinary uses. It had only one drawback—like all simple designs of the time it was beyond the reach of the average purse.

The late Victorians did not abandon the Renaissance type of woodwork that had been used earlier in the century, and



many rooms were decorated with panels, lozenges and cartouches "picked out" in colors in jewel-like effect. Painted furniture was also used in minor bedrooms. Occasionally a darker color was used on a painted piece in imitation of inlay, or drawers and moldings were outlined in bright, contrasting colors. With their more or less compact shapes, and their rounded panels edged with color, and their simple handles which were very often merely shaped pieces of wood, these painted bedroom pieces were not unpleasing. In important bedrooms, however, the inevitable choice was the massive, much-carved furniture made "*en suite*" in ebonized wood, mahogany, mahogany and walnut veneer, rosewood or gumwood. The French bed which had both back and front of equal height, that had been popular ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, gradually gave way before the great double bed with exceedingly high back, usually straight, which was decorated in numerous ways all of which added to the almost sinister quality of its appearance. It was decorated with rows of spindles, Gothic finials, vertical channeling as well as carvings, glued on, in the shapes of cornucopias, birds, vines and flowers. The commodious bureau, the tall chiffonier, both with marble tops, the lofty double-doored wardrobe whose cornice reached the ceiling (it was sometimes made to curve inward that the piece might be got into the room), the chairs, table and cheval glass—if there was one—were all carved to harmonize with the bed.

Up to the seventies, the place of woman in decoration had been largely an inspirational matter. The daughter of the chain of provision shops was supposed to be "artistic" in a harmless

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way. Her achievements in fancywork were counted among her accomplishments. Her life was a restricted one. Even had it been "nice" for her to be seen in public places alone, there were few places where she could go for harmless amusement. She was forced to spend many hours in the house, and in a kind of unconscious revenge she went to a great deal of trouble to "beautify" it. It was she who embroidered violets and morning-glories on the sofa cushions, and who made the "tidies" of crochet, appliqué, or darned-work on Java canvas for the backs of chairs and sofas, and for tacking on the wall behind washstands. The hand-painted china with decorations of birds, flowers, fruit and cupids that was placed on already overflowing tables and sideboards, was also hers. From her hands came the bulbous pincushions of lace, ribbon, velvet, embroidery and bead-work that sat in the center of every dressing table, placed on a crocheted or embroidered scarf, also of her making. It was she who made the fire screens, ottomans and footstools of Berlin wool-work. She was also responsible for the parasol lamp shades that—in the eighties and nineties—were placed on tall "standing lamps" of metalwork. (The directions in a fashion magazine of the nineties advises her to use black lace for her lamp shade, and to dangle down from the top of it streamers of ribbon "in a pretty shade of yellow, old-rose, pale green or some such delicate color," and to finish each streamer with a "fancy ball ornament." "Sometimes," she is told, "the pattern of the lace is followed by running gold, silver or copper thread through the meshes, giving quite a brilliant effect.") The gilded cockle shells lying on the table (they are not ash trays) are hers; and from her brush came the morning-glories

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and ivy sprays that trail across the looking-glass in the drawing-room. And no one but she could have filled the bowl of Worcester ware with gleaming rings that look as if they may once have belonged to princesses of Byzantium, but which on close inspection turn out to be a prodigious collection of cigar bands.

Every room in the house has some evidence of her industry and creative urge, some object bound, tied or streaming with hand-painted ribbons, some article of "utility" which she has fashioned and covered with forget-me-nots, cupids, blue birds, lilies-of-the-valley, peacocks and hearts. Even the men of the house could not escape her when she loomed before them like some unaccounted-for muse, showering her gifts. For them she made innumerable articles that surrounded them in every moment of the day and night with some forget-me-notted contrivance that would not open, or would not stay closed, or that soon fell apart. But her supreme creation for the man of her family was the Persian smoking cap of velvet, preferably red, which she decorated with gold braid in designs of fuchsias, sunflowers or fleur-de-lis.

The Victorian in the last decades of the century did not have to blow his tobacco smoke up the chimney, as his father had been forced to do, but he yet was not at liberty to smoke in any room in the house but the particular one set apart for the purpose. This room was called his "den," a term with implications of leonine qualities by which the Victorian housewife flattered her husband with velvety subtlety. He not only slunk off to his "den" whenever he wanted to smoke his cigar, this lion, but even there he was not free to light up until he

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had put on his smoking jacket of brown velvet and his smoking cap, made with loving care by his daughter, in order that, when he emerged and went again into the presence of the women, the odor of tobacco would not be on his clothes to offend sensitive feminine noses.

As for the "den" itself, a writer of the nineteen-hundreds has this to say of it: "A room of this sort is always a convenient 'catch-all' in a house. Pictures and odds and ends too good to throw away find a final resting-place in the den."

At last, in the late seventies, a semi-professional career opened up for the restless young upper-middle-class woman who felt that expression in the arts was not only worthy of her, but was also of benefit to mankind. (Ruskin had by now sunk like a lead bullet deep into the Victorian consciousness, causing only occasional twinges, and they were considered beneficial since they gave indications of the esthetic-ethical weather.) Now, with all this hand-painting on velvet, hand-painted furniture, friezes, paneling and other decorations painted by hand, the demand was less for the professional artist's training and gifts than for patience and a finicky deftness with the brush—work that was the more successful for having a slight flavor of the amateur. "Occasionally workmen [in a newly decorated house] may be surprised at the unaccustomed sight of ladies moving about with authority," writes a critic in 1882, but, he goes on to say, "for ladies, the painting of panels with vines, blossoming branches, and even birds, is a pretty industry." She had come into her own at last!



*From a photograph by Curtis Brown and Mason, London*

**Queen Victoria in her donkey cart at Nice**

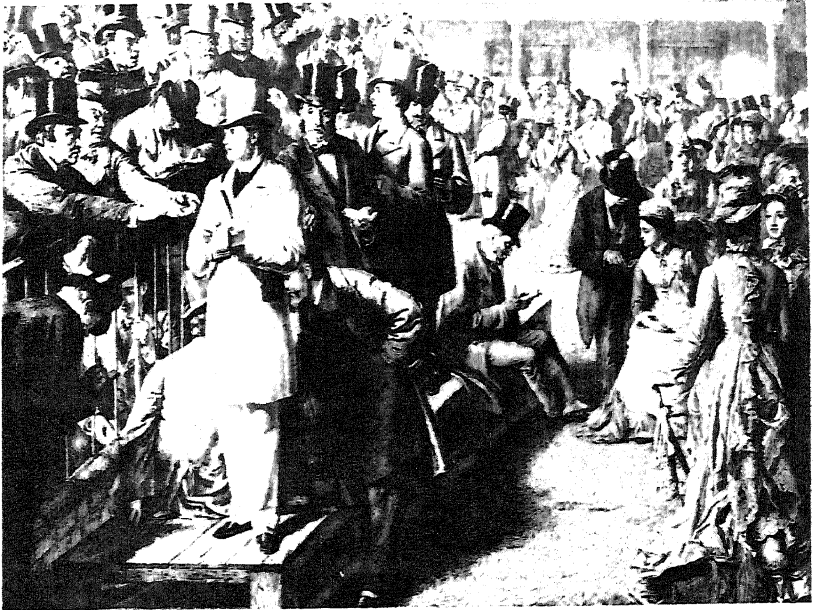
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In the fantastic and confused panorama of Victorian decoration, a certain unity can be traced in various interrelationships which form a kind of pattern—the particular flavor and aroma of the Romantic Age. In the last three decades of the century the Baroque lost its hold, it is true, and the rectilinear forms pressed forward by the “art decorators” were at last accepted; but in spirit the later Victorians remained faithful to the Baroque which, as Geoffrey Scott has said, is “like Nature, fantastic, unexpected, varied and grotesque.” In their acceptance of straight lines the later Victorians met the “art reformers” only halfway; for in their excessive applied ornament, which meant so much more to them than basic structure, they were essentially Baroque.

Classic unity was an absurd pedantry to the lovers of picturesque naturalism. Yet, capricious though they were, in matters of taste, the Victorians managed to express themselves in certain definable forms repeated in various ways.

The high Mansard, or “French” roofs, covered in gray slate, were reflected in the massive bureaus and chiffoniers as well as in the large drawing-room and library tables which had tops of gray marble. The little balconies of wood with carved balusters that were sprinkled over the exterior walls of houses, and which gave them a provocative Punch-and-Judy-show appearance, had their counterparts in chairs, beds, tables and sofas decorated with balusterlike spindles. Acorn pendants, Gothic finials and tracery were met with inside the house as well as out. The incised linear pattern of vaguely classic inspiration, that formed at intervals a stylized flower design, was used on exterior stone ornamentation

down to the nineteen-hundreds; it was also a standard type of decoration on interior woodwork and on furniture, in both of which it was often gilded. (This pattern appeared on



*Published by the Art Union of London, 1882*

"The Turf"

From an etching by Leopold Flameng after  
the painting by William Powell Frith

various objects, mirror frames; book covers, silverware, house hardware and textiles.) The incised motif of concentric circles, and the Egyptian palmette, were both used on furniture and woodwork, and as architectural ornament, from the seventies through the nineteen-hundreds. The shallow channeling of pilasters was also an architectonic form that was used on furniture. The cast-iron trellises that upheld the little loggias

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with pagoda tops of tin or slate, had an echo in the cast-iron hatstands in the walls.

The convenient curtain and the saving draperies that were used to cover up feeble and unsightly interior construction also had their corresponding lifesavers in architecture. In the neo-Gothic, Queen Anne, and "rustic" buildings constructed by the Victorians, the concealing curtains of ivy and Virginia creeper were always relied upon to eventually become an important part of the design.

In obedience to prevailing rhythms in the seventies, the lovely, absurd and highly impractical crinoline had to be discarded. Technics had interfered here too, and the crinoline had gone as far as it was possible for it to go when it had been taken out of the hands of dressmakers and had become the complicated steel armature produced by the manufacturers. In response to the new feminine drapery which—in the early seventies—had not yet shrunk to the tight skirt with a long train, but was concentrating fullness about the middle in anticipation of the bustle, window hangings became less billowing and flowing, and were arranged with more formalism, and decorated with a variety of ornate trimmings like those that appeared on women's dresses.

Dresses now had all the disregard for the basic framework that characterized architecture and cabinet making; the body of the woman underneath was only to be guessed at when she wore one of these basqued, overskirted costumes built up of decorative units, each a miracle of invention and laborious detail which stood out as an independent work of art. This complicated, architectonic dress, with its flutings, ruchings,





*After an engraving by S. J. Ferris*

Edward Askew Sothorn as "Lord Dundreary" in Tom Taylor's  
"Our American Cousin"

A minor part, Sothorn's "Dundreary" became famous on both sides of the Atlantic during the sixties and seventies. The character, which Sothorn played over six thousand times, inspired the fashion for "Dundreary" whiskers, also known as "Picadilly weepers"

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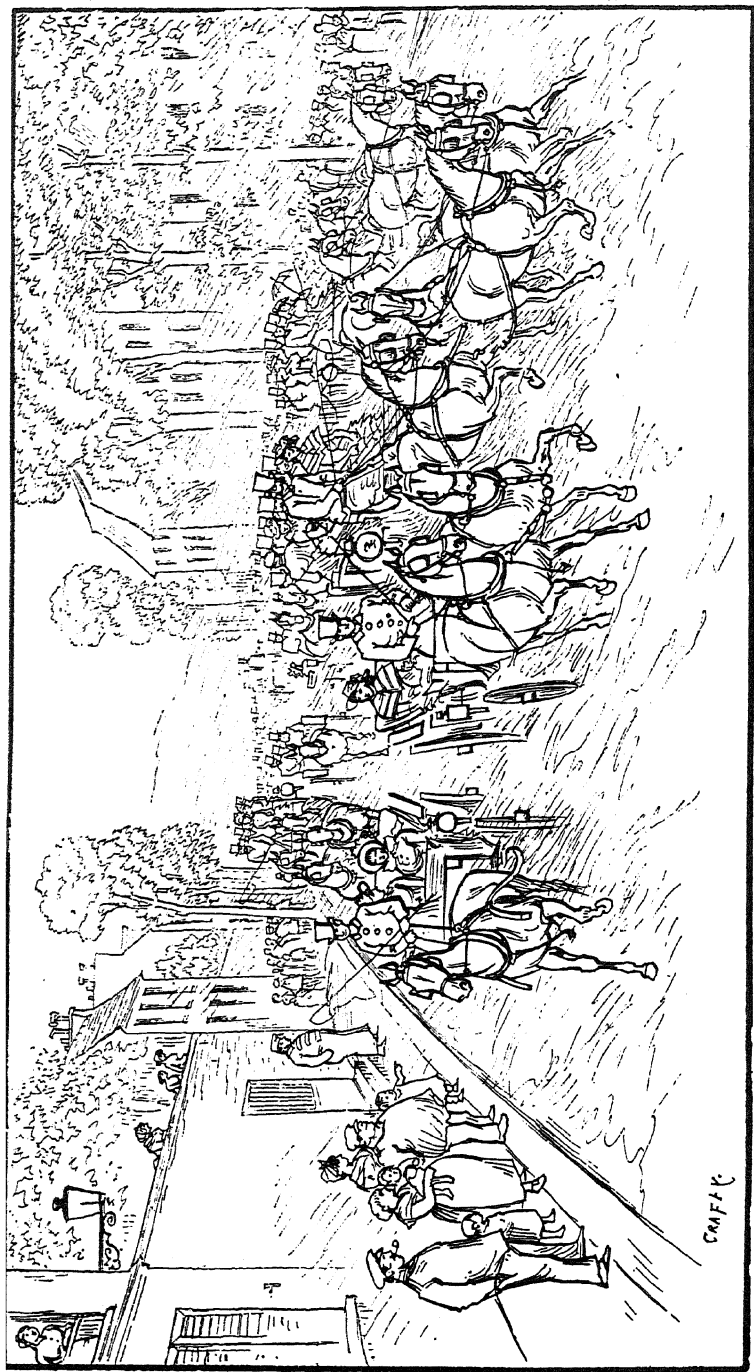
box pleats, braiding, passementerie, its "Vandyked lappets" and deep fringes of chenille and silk cord, its ball-fringes and long tassels, gave the key to interior decoration which used similar trimmings on furniture and textiles. The dressmaker's "Vandyked lappet," a form reflecting the neo-Gothic, was particularly popular in silk, velvet and plush for the decoration of gilt furniture. The long, pointed "Vandyked" form was also repeated in the long, spear-shaped leaves of the *Aspidistra* plant that had a place of honor in every late Victorian home. Of this shape, too, was the beard worn by the Prince of Wales, and which was soon adopted by the men in his "Marlborough House set" who preferred it to the old "Dundrearys" of the sixties. "Dundrearys" had been made popular by E. A. Sothorn who had worn a certain style of long side-whiskers as *Lord Dundreary*, a character in Tom Taylor's play, *Our American Cousin*. (Lincoln was at a performance of this play when he was shot.) The general popularity of the beard, "Dundreary," or neo-Gothic Edwardian, or the d'Orsay type that was "like Queen Elizabeth's ruff," was a typical Victorian manifestation, yet another expression of that dislike, that amounted almost to dread, of anything unadorned.

PART TWO

# FRANCE



At the Tuileries during the Second Empire  
A "Cent Garde" obliges as a vanity mirror



### Road through a Paris suburb in the eighties

The provincials turn out to look at the Parisians on their way to the races

From the drawing by Crafty

## WATERED BOURBON

WHEN in 1830 the Duke of Orleans climbed over the still smoking barricades to have himself made King of the French—*par décret du peuple*—he did not go alone. With him went the Imperial ghost. From then on there was no escaping it; it haunted him at the Élysée, at the Tuileries, at Compiègne, at Fontainebleau, at Saint-Cloud. On all sides were the arrogant “N’s” (portentous letter, composed of two arrow points!) and the other symbols of Cæsar, his eagles, stars and bees, his sphinxes and lions, fasces and casques, “victorys” and laurel wreaths.

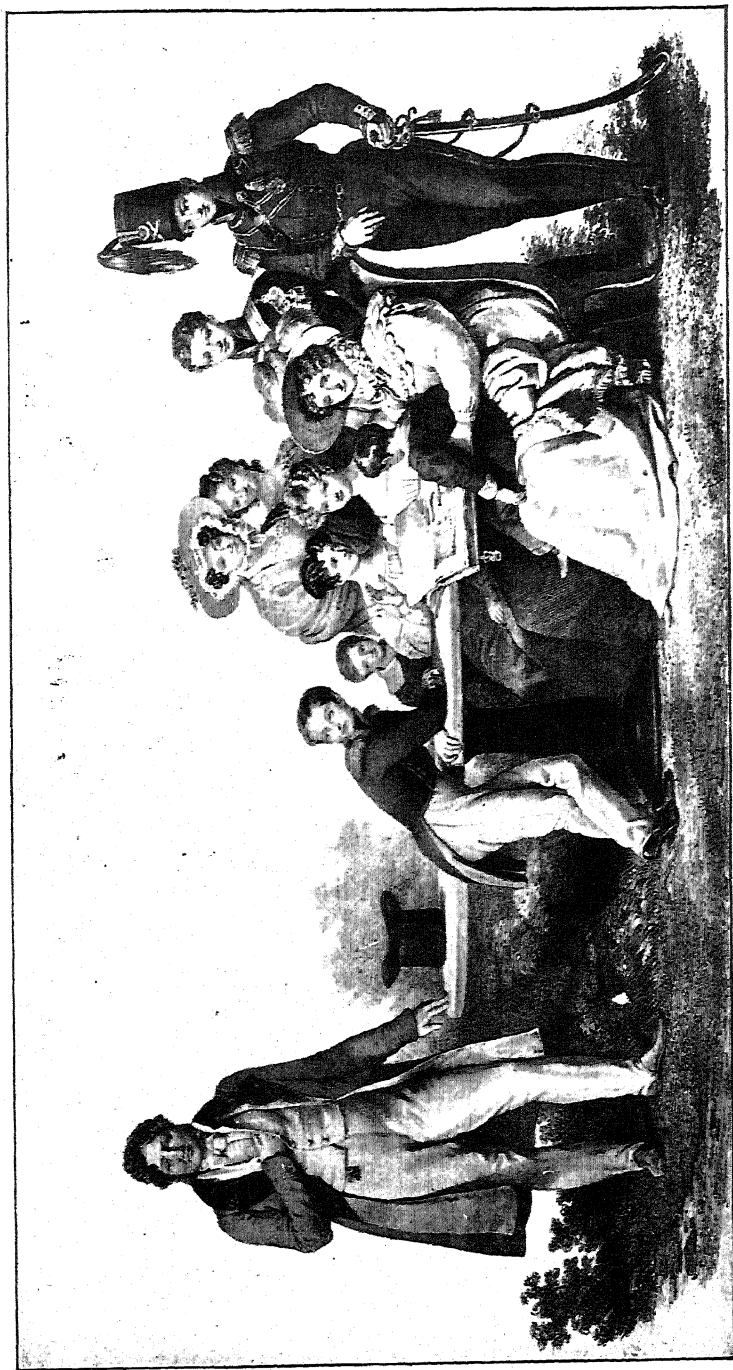
A nation might hand over her hero to the enemy, scrap his policies and smother his legend; but it could not, it seemed, so easily do away with the things with which he had surrounded himself. (Even the Restoration of the Bourbons had not brought about an obliteration of the Napoleonic souvenirs from the streets of Paris, nor a complete relegation of the imperial trappings to the State warehouses.) Napoleon, who had been a flame in the simple hearts of soldiers, had also kindled the more complex imaginations of artists and craftsmen. To these he represented the last hero in the classic tradition, a man who could pose in a toga without looking ridiculous, a man whose exaggerated gestures suited him as a son of the ancient Mediterranean, the home of inspired heroics.

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Impossible to design for him as one had for mere Bourbons who had borrowed majesty from the genius of their craftsmen: with Napoleon it had been a matter of orchestrating so that the accompaniment should not be drowned out by the principal singer in the piece.

Pompous, cold, self-conscious, overpoweringly official as it is, the style created for Napoleon has, nevertheless, genuine power and authority. It speaks well, too, for the French creative spirit, which, after functioning so magnificently through all the long years of the *Ancien Régime* was still so abundantly alive, even after the ardors and exhaustions of revolution and almost continual war, that under the impact of Napoleon's personality Jacob Desmaller, Percier, and Fontaine, and their followers and imitators, were able to produce, almost out of the blue, a truly new and vital creation. Uncompromisingly autocratic, the style conquered the world. During practically the entire nineteenth century its forms, modified arbitrarily, or altered through provincial misconceptions, recurred in international design.

Napoleon, on the eve of his exile to Elba, sent an ironic message to his successor at the Tuileries: "Tell Louis if he is wise he will sleep in my bed—it is a good one." Louis XVIII took the advice. (The Tuileries had hundreds of beds, most of them magnificent and nearly all of them uncomfortable.) The lesser Bourbon, Louis-Philippe, also appropriated the Imperial beds. At Compiègne he slept in the imposing Roman-tent bed with its elaborate carvings and ormolu decorations, its stars, palms and bound reeds, with Minerva on guard atop each front post. (Under the draped canopy was Louis-Philippe's



"The Foremost Bourgeois Family in France"  
Louis-Philippe, "the citizen king"; at right, Queen Marie-Amélie, her  
five sons and three daughters, and Louise d'Orléans, her sister-in-law

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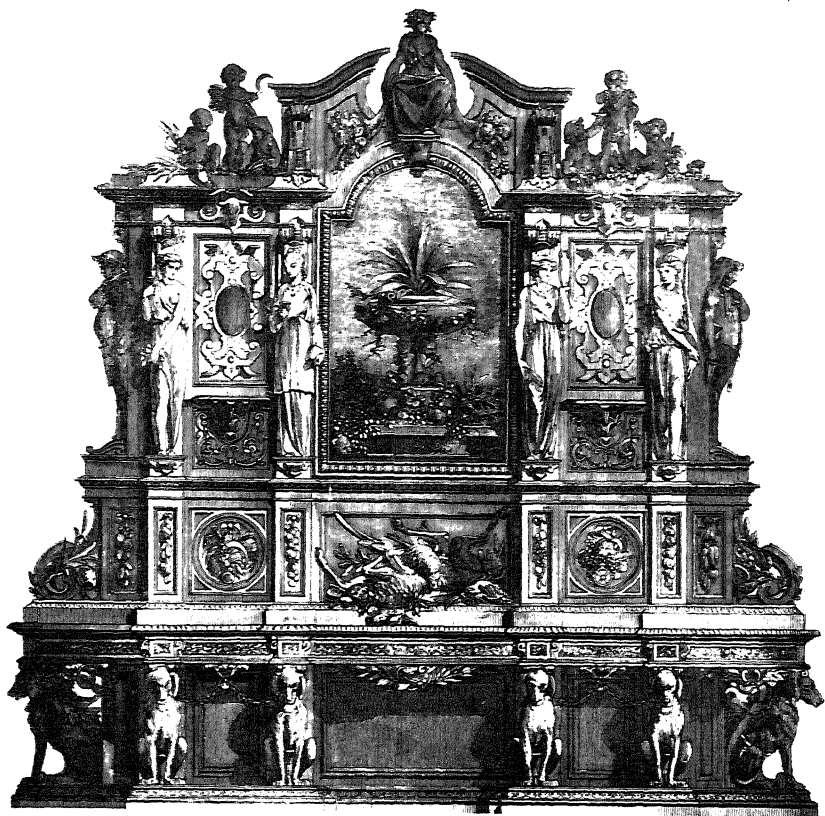
head in its London nightcap invaded by reeling panoramas of Austerlitz, Jena, Friedland and Wagram? And in the morning, fumbling for his slippers *style bon bourgeois*, did he stub his toe against the great Hessian boots that had paced all the long night before the Battle of Waterloo?)

Louis-Philippe, who had walked stolidly to the throne of kings, wearing his brown wig, his pockets crammed with letters from the small brokers, bankers, *industriels* and railroad *actionnaires* who wished him (and themselves) well, fanned no leaping sparks in the hearts of artists. He was a lover of the English and English ways. After Waterloo it had become the fashion to admire and imitate the English: and why not? To a people who had been shaken to their depths in the birth-agonies of Democracy, how smugly safe must have appeared that little country just across la Manche, that England who arrogantly persisted in ignoring all the most attractive postulations of political theory, and who yet seemed always to succeed in everything she attempted, whose greatest internal struggles always turned out in the end to be nothing more than family quarrels! "You have Liberty without Democracy," the French were to tell her enviously later on, "while we have Democracy without Liberty."

Louis-Philippe, as proof of his admiration for England, inspired the French to design in a style that expressed French ideas of English conservative taste. Born of envious admiration, snobbism, and a bourgeois conception of what constitutes a proper esthetic—one which should be free of both the fastidiousness and imagination of a culture based on privilege, and of the vital rhythms natural to the art-expression of an



enlightened peasantry—the “Victorian” style came into being. A French organization of the British ideal of comfort, it



French sideboard

Fourdinois of Paris created this elaborate piece with its characteristic mid-nineteenth-century carvings of figures and Renaissance motifs

was called by the French the “*confortable*” or the “*confort moderne*.”

Memories of revolution and anarchy, even the disquieting voices of the Socialists which seemed to be growing louder and stronger every day, could be put out of mind in the safe

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refuge of a setting that reflected the security of too fortunate England; a setting that seemed directly inspired by the *dimanche londonien* and the domestic ritual celebrated stoically in London front parlors where a slight odor of suet pudding mingled with the musty smell of the family Bible. This Anglo-French style, eminently middle-class, the triumph of the average, is expressive, more than any other in the entire range of decoration, of the ideal *home*, a place where superlatives are out of order, where a certain dowdiness is heartening, where good taste itself is a kind of intrusion. For these qualities which have made it despised it has sneaked back into favor among those who are, as Baudelaire said of the French "Victorians," "*attendris des regrets.*"

Typical of the Louis-Philippe are the *étagère* (Balzac speaks of it in one instance as the "*dunkerque*" while across the Channel it is the what-not); the *pouf*, or large, center ottoman, and the small ottoman, or high, padded stool.

The *étagère* was made in many forms, usually of carved rosewood, mahogany, or blackened pear wood. It was sometimes merely a series of open, graduated shelves made to fit into a corner. Or it was made in two parts with the upper section composed of an open shelf with a galleried top, and with compartments on either side formed by turned posts. A mirrored backing was often placed in both sections. Wax flowers under glass domes, one on either side, were inevitable ornaments of the *étagère*, but bric-a-brac of all kinds was also placed on its shelves. The *étagère*, like other furniture of the time, was usually mounted on castors.

Another piece developed during the July Monarchy was the

trestle table, the *table à patins*, which had the base formed like the runners of a sled. This was remotely related to the Gothic trestle table, but the nineteenth-century designers created a distinct and characteristic type which in its flimsy and fanciful construction had little in common with the old form.

Chairs were usually made of *palissandre* (rosewood), ebony or mahogany. There were "Gondola" chairs, violin- lyre- and urn-back chairs, and chairs with dolphin and swan forms (motifs taken from the Restoration). The true invention of the style and one that expressed the period with its illogicality, and its disregard of the laws of design (one of which is fitness to purpose) was the delightfully absurd key-ring-back chair which looks as if a designer, who had set out to reproduce a Louis XVI upholstered round-backed chair, had then, in a fit of perversity squeezed the shape together and left out the upholstery. (The Baroque *œil-de-bœuf* window is a near relation.) It was very handsome indeed in papier-mâché, or in lacquered wood, with elaborate decorations in gold leaf and with mother-of-pearl inlay.

Not the least attractive of the Louis-Philippard were the little lamps, with round Argand burners, in their porcelain vases, or on bases of marble or "coated" glass in classic shape, with globes of china or translucent glass. In formal rooms, ablaze with great crystal lustres, and *torchères* at all four corners, the Argand lamps were sometimes placed on either side of the mantel in Sèvres vases three or four feet high. The antimacassar, a mainstay of the Victorian in England, was also dotted about on upholstered furniture in the Louis-Philippe house. (Its name, in its French form, was less repulsive, however.

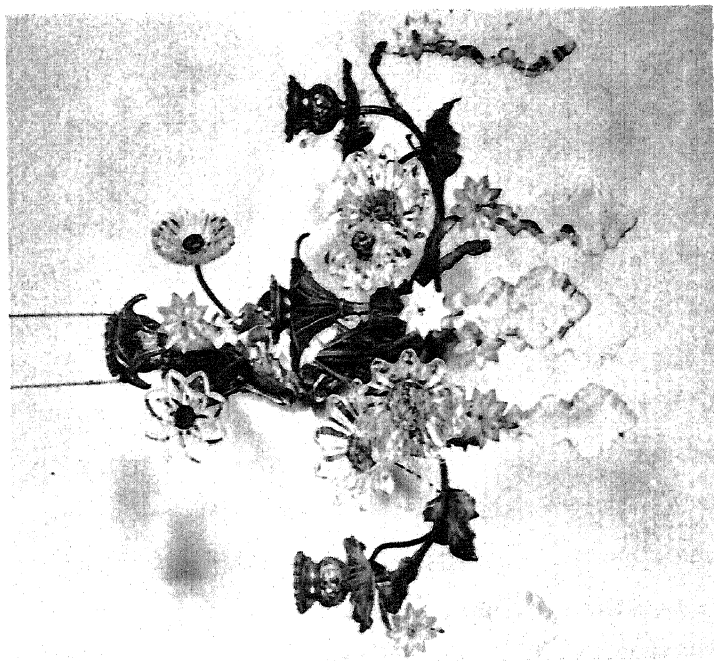
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Although it might have been called the anti-*huile céphalique*—the trade name of the French macassar oil—it was simply called the *tête-à-tête*.)

The respectable Louis-Philippard with its fine woods and often excellent carving, and its cautious inventions, was not the only style in favor during the Monarchy of July. When the anglophile Louis-Philippe walked about the streets of Paris flaunting his citizenship, and his umbrella (the scepter of Democracy), the Empire style was still a strong influence upon design, and the Etruscan, Pompeian and Egyptian forms typical of the Empire, which were modified during the Restoration, were also adapted by designers under Louis-Philippe.

To borrow ideas from the past seemed to the designers of the day a practice far worthier of their profession than the creation of new ideas. The nomination, in 1837, of a Commission of Historical Monuments gave the cachet to all sorts of feverish rummaging among venerable stones for choice tidbits to be used in the hodge-podge of renaissance. Where Napoleon's *ébénistes*, metal workers and others of his mastercraftsmen, in deserting the present for their inspiration, had brought from the past only those forms that would produce a homogeneous style, and one that would give added significance to their particular epoch, Louis-Philippe's designers indulged in antiquarianism for its own sake.

Their *passion de vieux-neuf* led them to produce contortions of the Empire *Gallo-Romain*; a bastard Louis XIV with cheap, imitation Boulle and marquetry manufactured in factory lots; a dry and rigid Louis XVI, and a synthetic Italian Renaissance—the *style Troubadour*. They also produced a strange Gothic



*Courtesy, James Pendleton, Inc., New York*



**Louis-Philippe metal-work chandeliers**

Crystal flowers and pendants decorate the one at the right

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that had a peculiar haunting charm for the *femme entretenue* whose ideas of art were similar to those of the London Cockney who reached esthetic heights when he saw "a portrait of the Archbishop of Canterbury done in brown sugar."

The brilliant firm of Chenavard, founded by the architect-designer who was the first apostle of "art in industry," performed miracles of eclecticism. Their design book was filled with sketches of interiors in which the spirit of past styles was carried out with admirable virtuosity. Madame could order a Greco-Roman room with a fountain in the center and with walls painted in simulation of formally draped cloth held by rosettes from which hung heavy tassels; the Greco-Roman room also had a draped couch with pillows embroidered with arrows, torches and wings, and furniture, designed after that in wall paintings and tombs, with classic curves and legs that terminated in animal bodies, or harpies with great clawed feet.

Or, if she had dreams of the fascinating East which France was steadily dotting with the tricolor, she could command an Arabian room with walls painted in arabesques, and where all was splendid with *mussarabies*, mosaic pavements, and ebony furniture inlaid with ivory. Or she could have a Persian room with glowing tiles and sumptuous stuffs that gleamed like jewels; or a Turkish room with horseshoe arches, and tent-like draperies suspended by crossed spears over voluptuous low divans. Or she might want a Chinese room with boxlike lacquered tables and mandarin chairs; or an Italian Renaissance room with an imposing mantelpiece of carved wood, "peasant" chairs with shaped backs of solid carving, and tall cabinets of ebony, or ebonized wood, decorated with plaques of Sèvres

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porcelain and inlays of silver. Henri II, or Louis XIII—she could make her choice. If her romantic nature craved the hypnotic shadows of the middle ages, then there was Gothic for her delight; rooms with walls hung in tapestry, in which the fur-



*From "L'Art dans La Maison"*

Smoking-room in the "Oriental" style as conceived by  
nineteenth-century designers

M. C. David was the architect

niture was decorated with lancets, tracery, crockets, pinnacles, quatrefoils, and sculptured figures in wood that might or might not have represented the saints.

Window shades with historical scenes painted on heavy silk, or on transparent material, could be had, as well as frail little chairs in ash, lemon or pear wood, brightly gilded. Carved

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and gilded consoles with colored marble tops; or *méridiennes*—an adaptation of the Empire sofa that had but one arm and a low back. No matter what period of design might be asked for, Chenavard could supply it. They offered a tour of the world in a Cashmere shawl. Of all this extremely clever historical and geographical looting, Henri Clouzot says: "It was not beautiful, and it was certainly far from being simple." (Alfred de Musset, his romanticism having soured in the tropical atmosphere of George Sand on a voyage to Italy, complains in his "Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle" that "Our century has no form of its own. We have not impressed ourselves upon our houses or our gardens. . . . In the streets we meet men with their beards trimmed in the style of the time of Henri III . . . others whose hair is cut like Raphael's in his portrait. We have about us every period but our own, a condition never observed in any other epoch; eclecticism, that is the only style we have.")

In the late thirties France was beginning to find out that the bloody ordeal endured for the sake of a true democracy had produced instead something quite different. The opportunities for making money from money, discovered back in the turbulent days of the Directory, were now at last solidifying into a system with a new complex of ideas and procedures, and with a new type of man resulting from it, the modern financier. (It is significant that this nineteenth-century word is also a French one.)

The *Nucingens* and *Rastignacs*, the *industriels* and *négo-ciants*, and all the hangers-on, climbers and leeches and gold-





*Courtesy, Bland Gallery, New York*

Spanish ballet dancer of the fifties  
After the painting by the Spanish artist Antonio Esquivel

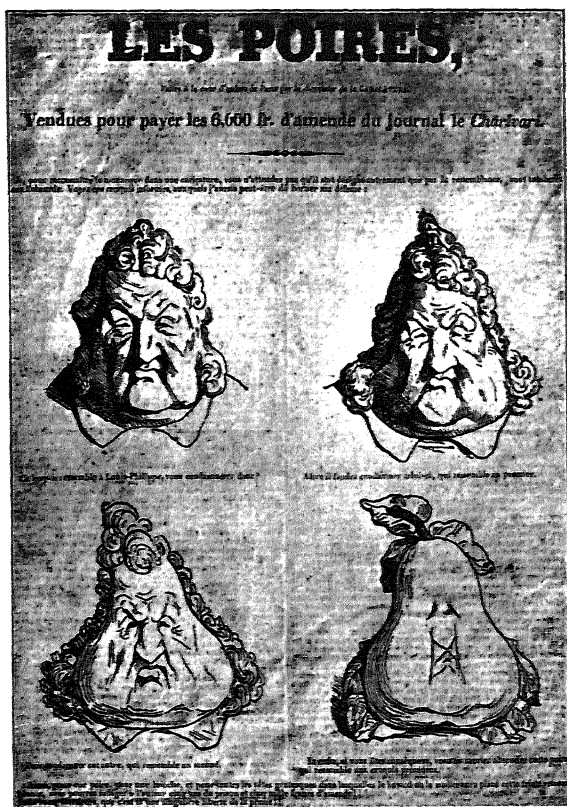
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diggers of the hard, sordid and fascinating world of Balzac's "Comédie Humaine," had their living counterparts in the Paris of Louis-Philippe. The King's example was not followed: as he grew more and more stodgily correct, his Paris grew more reckless. After Victoria and Albert had stamped the British Court with a definite pattern, making of it a work of art in its careful organization, its emphatic rhythm, Louis-Philippe modeled his own court upon it.

In the château at Neuilly, surrounded by its English park, in the gentle light of the Argand lamps Louis-Philippe read his evening newspaper, while the matronly Queen Marie-Amélie worked at her tapestry frame, and the princesses painted fruit and flowers on velvet to be used for chair seats, or they embroidered velvet covers to be placed on the large, round pedestal tables where they would hang down, full and long, like women's skirts.

But there were also nights at the opera where the Court sat grouped about the Royal Family and listened to Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* or *Robert le Diable*—music which was full of Baroque flourishes and gusty curves of sound; and where they watched the ballet in the new, short skirts of tulle that heightened the grace and artificiality of the dancers. Now and then they might see La Taglioni in her ordered, classical movements, or Fanny Elssler's *grâce dans le terrible* in *Bluebeard*, or see her, a magical, fiery *Ariel* in a *Tempest* full of pleasant things, but almost entirely innocent of Shakespeare.

Or the Court fastened on its largest diamonds and dressed itself in its best *poult de soies*, *blondes* and *taffetas vagues de Danube*, and crowded into the Salle Carré at Saint-Cloud,



### "Old King Pear-Head"

The transformation of the King's head into a pear as drawn by Philipon in *La Caricature*. It was Honoré Daumier who made "le Roi Poire" a classic in the reign of Louis-Philippe

where a gaunt, thin man sat at a square piano and played mazurkas, waltzes, polonaises, ballades and nocturnes that seemed to chill the room as if by the presence of a gentle angel of despair.

Outside the Court and the Fauborg Saint-Germain (disapprovingly interested) and the financial world (in working

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hours) no one paid much attention to the fat little man who represented the less august branch of the House of Bourbon. "Old King Pear-Head" they called him on the Boulevards. (Daumier's caricatures of the King in which he drew his head in the shape of a pear gave the Parisians this convenient epithet for showing their contempt of the King.)

Louis-Philippe might be the King of the French, but the King of Paris was unquestionably the man who happened to be the most successful banker of the moment and who ruled the world of the *jeunesse dorée*, the *gants jaunes*, the *lions*, and *tigres*, the *biches* and *dandys*. The French Beau Brummells, led by the radiant d'Orsay, practised their cult of beauty and boredom in Louis-Philippe's Paris, wearing their English clothes with a Gallic difference, and sprinkling their French with English words, most of them mispronounced. In a world constantly filling with *parvenus*, the traditional dandy insolence was carried to extremes never dreamt of by even Beau Brummell himself. Fashionable hostesses sought out this wholly unsatisfactory "stag-line" for their "routs" because the dandys could always be counted upon to spend the evening sprawled on the most conspicuous *poufs* surrounded by a circle of admiring matrons waiting for the prize pun of the evening.

Although the dandy of the top ranks kept English thoroughbreds he was seldom a rider. Active sport was too vulgar for his taste—and it might spoil his figure. He prided himself upon his slim, womanish body with its narrow, sloping shoulders and small waist. (The incomparable d'Orsay was a traitor to his cult in this respect; he was an expert in many sports—he could even swim!) The chief sport indulged in by the dandy

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was fencing, and this was for a purely practical reason. Obviously, in the life of the perfected dandy many occasions would arise on which it would be necessary for him to defend his life. Next to the ring-back chair, the *pouf*, and the foamy ballet skirt, the dandy was probably the most successful decorative object created during the July Monarchy.

The *anglomanie* of the King and the dandys spread through the world of fashion. The *jeunesse dorée* of the thirties and forties drove in Tilburys and "breaks" and "*bogheys*," and owned "*bouledogues*." Their coachmen and footmen wore wigs of white cotton curls in imitation of wigs worn by the servants of the British "milords." (There was a heavy tax on powdered wigs for servants in England.) They organized their Jockey Club after the pattern of the exclusive London clubs. (The Jockey Club was so exclusive that it was easier to get into the Court at the Tuileries than to become a member. Even Alfred de Musset was barred—presumably on the old grounds that if a man is a poet he cannot be a gentleman as well.)

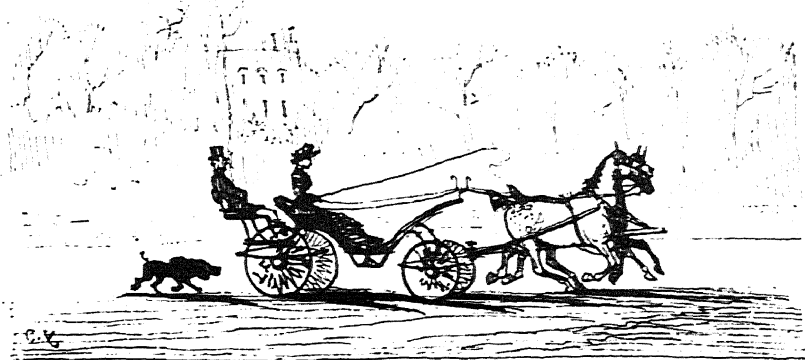
The most famous character on the Boulevards, not even excepting the Prince of Dandys himself, was an Englishman. This was the man known to all the *fashionnables*, as well as to the various members of "Bohemia," as "Milord Arsouille," and about whom a legend had been woven in which he was made to appear as a fabulously rich eccentric who showered gold upon the girls in the cafés. When the Boulevards made the discovery that the familiar figure known as "Arsouille" was an impostor striving for celebrity they relished the added touch of fantasy, but at the same time refused to call the impostor by his real name. (The real "Arsouille" was Lord Henry Sey-

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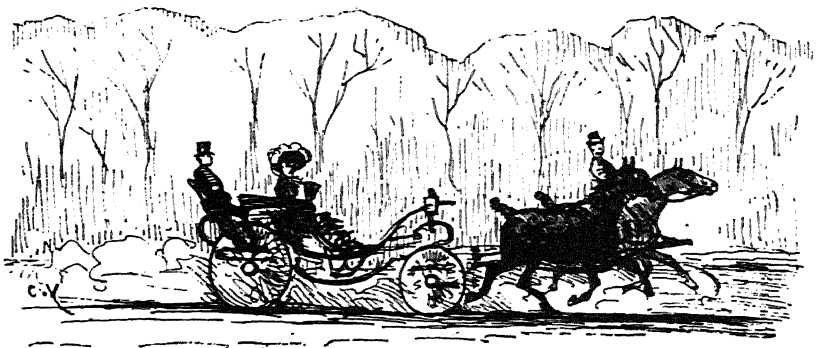
mour, founder of the Jockey Club, whose one interest in life was sport and who cringed under the spotlight of Boulevard notoriety.)

Another familiar figure on the Boulevards of the early thirties was the young Eugène Sue, who spent a large fortune in his efforts to achieve the heights of dandyism. Sue wore his hair in curls, owned a handsome collection of spectacular *gilets*, tight-fitting *pantalons* of the finest Cashmere and *cuisse des nymphes* cloth made by London tailors, and gold and platinum buttons to wear down the front of his evening waistcoats. He had a fine stable of English thoroughbreds and his own jockey wore his colors at Longchamps. He rode his saddle horse in the Bois de Boulogne wearing long tight trousers, his full coat tails flying in the wind, holding his cane straight up before him like a candle carried in a church procession. (The approved dandy style.) When he drove down the Champs-Élysées in his English-made phaeton of light green "picked out" in white, his two little Cockney grooms perched up behind, his horses, one gray and the other chestnut, with their manes clipped à l'Anglaise, he dazzled the crowds sitting under the trees, admiration that meant more to him than the fact that all Paris was reading his "Plick et Plock."

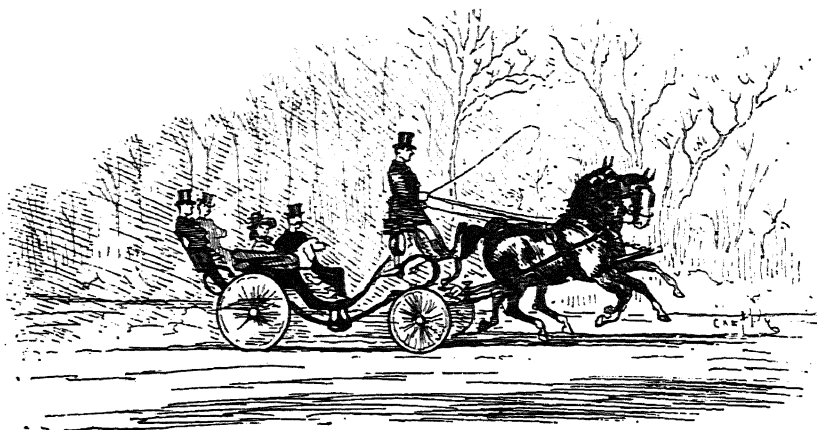
But Sue lacked the special, rarefied ingredients which make up the perfect dandy. His dandyism was a product of will, and not the final flower of art achieved after a long process of painstaking cultivation and self-discipline. After his first novel appeared his chances for getting beyond the mere fringe of dandyism were forever lost. A dandy who worked was not to be considered—an impossible combination! And there was no



A Parisian *élégante* on her morning's drive in the Bois



A "Marguérite Gautier" of the Republic being seen in the Bois



*From a drawing by Crafty*

Newly rich pair showing off their horses and carriage in the Bois

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doubt but that Eugène Sue worked. The presses were kept busy turning out his popular books, most of which, true to the age of Romanticism, delved into history for their background. Then, commissioned to write a serial for the *Journal des Débats*, Sue ran through his notes on future story material and found that he had about exhausted the possibilities of history. He looked about him and was struck with the idea that in Paris itself there might be a story waiting to be told. He found it. Not in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, not in the new quarters of luxury, the Chaussée d'Antin and the Rue Saint Honoré districts, but in the mean, crooked, dark little streets of old, decayed Paris; the alleys and *coup-gorges* where a great anonymous mass of Parisians lived unknown to the upper world which composed his readers. These were the people about whom only the professors wrote, and then only as abstractions defined by Poverty and Crime. Sue made the discovery that they were human beings, more fiercely alive than those in his own world, uncomplicated by ethical subtleties, but with their own laws and taboos, and a wonderful, rich, supple language, almost impossible for the outsider to understand. He merely skimmed the surface, but in doing so he gathered such a rich collection of extraordinary material that his "Mystères de Paris" was soon on every velvet-covered rosewood table in every Paris salon. Maps of the mean Paris streets were issued, and a dictionary of underworld slang. The first gangster novel was under way—it appeared in installments—and the first literary "slumming" was begun. The underworld itself awoke to the surprise of its own identity. It had a spokesman at last. Sue began to find himself in the strange rôle of



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Friend of the Unfortunate. The rôle began to take hold of him; at last he discovered that it was when he visited the Faubourg Saint-Germain that he was playing a part, and that when he was in anonymous Paris he was himself. *Sue le Fat*, the dandys called him; he had never quite belonged. Mysterious Paris, Paris of the submerged, diverse, always changing, usually from low to lower; held together by a common interest—a loose, flexible unity ready for some great injustice to unite the disparate elements into a compact whole, ready to explode: this Paris took him in. The would-be dandy ended in becoming a Socialist deputy.

English Romanticism came from across the Channel in exciting vibrations (scarcely felt at their source) bringing the mystery of the North, with its ice and fire, as an antidote against the hard perfection of Classicism. Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Shakespeare fed the roots of French Romanticism that blossomed in Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Alfred de Musset, Alexandre Dumas, Alfred de Vigny, Prosper Mérimée, Meyerbeer, Berlioz, and Delacroix. Prudery, respectability and Romanticism coming in waves of equal potency from across the Channel!

George Sand, after a practical test of Romance—with ailing genius in a cold and windy Spain—sat in her Paris study smoking her chain of cigars and cigarettes (“she *does* smoke her little cigarette,” wrote Margaret Fuller) and writing a new kind of Romanticism, founded on the lives of the “little people” who worked on the land and in small industries. In her house on the Place d’Orléans, Chopin composed his nostalgic preludes at a square piano of rosewood (there were no embroid-

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ered scarves, framed daguerreotypes or knick-knacks on *this* piano!) in a room in which there were tall Chinese vases filled with flowers, a carved-oak dresser laden with "curiosities," chairs painted green, and Calametta's portrait of the authoress. (In George Sand's bedroom there was a large mattress on the floor covered with Persian draperies and cushions.) In this drawing-room Sand received Margaret Fuller who came full of misgiving about meeting the lioness face to face—she was also worried about her French—and who wrote back to New England: "I am sure her generous heart has not failed to draw some rich drops from every kind of wine press." She also wrote, in her glowing defense of the woman whose very name brought a shuddering moral chill down the New England spine, "she was never coarse, never gross."

Balzac went his way apart, untouched by the forces that moved his contemporaries—dandyism, Anglo-Teutonic Romanticism, Romantic-historicism, Saint-Simonism, Fourierism, Socialism. In volume after volume he presented his factual records of his countrymen almost as if he had been appointed as a sort of superlative bookkeeper to set down his accounts in human beings instead of in figures. Yet he had his own particular weakness, in which perhaps he revealed himself as a Romanticist after all; he was an expert in what he calls *bricabracologie*—and he had a passion for observing and describing the rooms people lived in, all the various objects that surrounded them in their daily lives.

(The astute Henri Clouzot, in his fascinating study, *Balzac et ses Fournisseurs*, attributes at least a part of Balzac's zeal

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for decorative objects, and his habit of overloading his novels with categorical descriptions of interiors, as well as his frequent digressions upon the fine arts, to the fact that Balzac was the first to realize the power of the written word to awaken the acquisitive appetite. In other words, that Balzac was the first man to write publicity, in the modern sense of the term. And Clouzot claims that in mentioning objects of art in his novels, and other products of artists, craftsmen and manufacturers, in connection with thinly-disguised names, Balzac expected and often received handsome presents for his pains.)

Balzac gives us vivid glimpses of the surroundings created for those who had become rich in this time of peace and industrial democracy when wealth was shifting from the old aristocracy of the land to a new *couche* of society which drew its wealth from speculation and manufacturing. With gilt, marbles, satins, brocades and tapestries, and the new *capitonage*—the thickly wadded and tufted upholstery of chairs and couches—the interiors of the nouveaux riches were magnificent and tasteless; “*richesse de café*,” Balzac calls it.

A typical *parvenu* of the time was *Celestin Crevel*, whom Balzac describes as having fought his way up to the top, all the time dreaming of the day when he should be a big banker and have a house exactly like that of the millionaire he envied the most. When his day does come, the fact that the house he has been craving is in a style already outmoded does not deter him; he rushes to his architect and his decorator “with eyes closed and purse wide open.”

And there was *Mme Marneffe*, who had a lovely little garden in the heart of Paris, a miniature Versailles in which

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not one tree or shrub was more than a year old. *Mme Marneffe* was on the fringe of what Balzac calls the upper submerged; but there are engaging descriptions of the backgrounds made for the various *filles* and *belles femmes* in the lives of the bankers and brokers of the Human Comedy—the *Coralies*, *Jenny Cadines*, *Camille de Maupins*, and *Héloïse Brisetouts* who sang a little or acted a little, but whose real profession was to dress gorgeously, live luxuriously and to keep in good humor those who paid the bills.

Some of the *Marguerite Gautiers* preferred the erotic-mysticism of the pseudo-Gothic boudoir—dimly lit, Poe-esque settings with stained-glass windows, crimson velvet hangings, and furniture, including a *prie-dieu*, carved in forms inevitably associated with the cathedral and the convent. (For the Gothic-style room there were even pianos carved with Gothic motifs.) In the *petit salon* of *Mlle des Touches* in “*Beatrix*,” hung with splendid Gobelins tapestries, the furniture is neo-Gothic and pseudo-Renaissance; the windows are heavily masked with an antique changeable brocade which shows now gold and red, now yellow and green, and from this hangs a “royal fringe” and huge tassels “worthy of the most magnificent ecclesiastical canopy.”

Other *Jenny Cadines* and *Camille de Maupins* preferred fragile feminine backgrounds à la *Mme de Pompadour* with pseudo-Bouille cabinets and *bonheur des dames*, and round table-tops and *bonheur du jours* in elaborate—though badly made—marquetry; rich carpets from the Savonnerie factory, and exquisite objects created by the master craftsmen in ormolu—flowers and vines and cupids in metal combined with



*Courtesy, Editions Nilsson, Paris*

### French furniture of the romantic age

*Top left:* What-not with a mirrored backing and elaborate pierced-work carving. Carcel lamps. *Top right:* Bureau in bois de rose with ormolu. The desk with marquetry decorations, *bottom left,* and the walnut commode, *bottom right,* are from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

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marble and enamel. The kind of setting in which nearly all men feel out of place, and therefore off their guard.

Balzac, extraordinary in all things, was not to be frightened by feminine daintiness; in his description of a particularly choice example of the jewel-box type of interior he seems to pat each fold of cloth into place, to dwell gloatingly on the whole *mise-en-scène* with an oily and paternal eye.

In this particular room the decorative scheme was carefully carried out down to the smallest detail, he says, "even to the ceiling," which was decorated with blue silk over which white Cashmere was pleated in star-shaped pattern, held in place at regular intervals along the cornice by knots of pearls, from which the folds hung down the walls. From the center rosette there hung, from three handsomely chased silver chains, a silver lamp studded with turquoise. A characteristic Louis-Philippard touch in this dainty background, *style grande cocotte*, was the heavily carved rosewood "Victorian" furniture which, no matter where it is placed, manages to create its own quaint atmosphere of bourgeois propriety.

For the background of a *dame comme il faut* like *Beatrice*, Balzac chooses an old house on the Parc Monceau. When *Calyste* comes to see her the servant opens for him a red-velvet door with lozenges in red silk and decorations of brass nail-heads. *Calyste* waits to hear "the frou-frou of silk" that announces the heroine in every Victorian novel in a salon which glows like an ancient chalice with the grenadine velvet on the walls, the tall vases of red Celadon, the gilt of furniture, the yellow silk of draperies, and the muffled richness of a Persian rug used as a table covering.

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But Balzac was not always painting his scenes à la Greuze or à la Delacroix; he could also use the stark, biting line in the manner of Daumier. There is his description of the wretched sitting room in *Mme Vauquer's* boarding house, with its furniture covered in horsehair "woven in alternate stripes, dull and glossy," its round table in the center with a top of purplish-red marble, its bluish-gray clock on the mantelpiece (how these two repulsive marbles combine to produce a depressing atmosphere of genteel poverty!) and its walls covered with a "painted paper" with scenes from "Télémaque." A room for the friendless and miserable stranger in Paris to sit in and listen to the gray clock ticking, and stare at the exploits of the classical hero pictured on the walls. What is Telemachus to him, or he to Telemachus! Even here in *Mme Vauquer's* house the technical developments of the industrial age have penetrated. Because of recent inventions, which have made graphic printing cheap, any mean room can have its framed prints of famous masterpieces, and its colored paper hangings with proud pageants of the kind that were formerly only for the walls of the rich, where they appeared in the form of tapestries or mural paintings. The more modest the interior the more grandiose was the theme selected for the walls. Scenes à la Racine and Corneille were enormously popular in the time of Louis-Philippe. But there were as well scenes of bucolic life like those on the *toiles de Jouy*—the life on the farm satisfyingly idealized—and foreign scenes such as those in which Italian peasants danced the Tarantella. After 1840 one of the most popular "painted papers" was *Le Retour des Cendres*, which illustrated the pageant that took place on the day when

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Napoleon's ashes were brought back from Saint Helena to be placed in the Invalides.

The bringing back of the remains of the national hero was the final triumph of the ghost that haunted Louis-Philippe. In making this gesture, Louis-Philippe revealed the state of panic to which the haunting ghost had brought him, the panic that leads a man to bring to pass the very thing he dreads will happen. Persecuted by the ghost, he had completed the Napoleonic Arc de Triomphe, the most conspicuous monument in a Paris swarming with veterans of *La Grande Armée* who defiantly wore their Bonapartist violets, and who stood on street corners ready to embroider "The Legend" to any passer-by who could be made to listen.

"The Legend" had other apostles. Louis-Philippe's artists who, with the exception of Daumier and his "*Le Roi Poire*," were singularly sparing in portraits of his majesty, were prolific in Napoleonic canvases. The poets perpetuated "The Legend" in stately Alexandrines. The children were exposed to its dangerous glamor at the Cirque d'Été where the Franconi Brothers presented breath-taking spectacles in which the hero, as First Consul and as Emperor, appeared on his white horse: "Moscow and the Passage of the Beresina"; "The Campaign of Egypt and the Battle of the Pyramids"; "Austerlitz, or the Dog of the Regiment"; "Marengo, or the Two *Vivandières*." Inflammable performances, all authorized by the King and his ministers!

When Fanny Elssler came to Paris from Vienna she shocked and delighted fashionable society with a new and daring dance, the *cachucha*, a Spanish dance that even the *grandes dames* of



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the Faubourg Saint-Germain wanted to learn, and which the King had performed at Versailles as a part of the celebration at the wedding of one of his daughters. The Viennese dancer had an even greater success in connection with "The Legend." When she arrived in Paris the Bonapartists seized the opportunity to give a Bonaparte celebration. Was she not a vibrant and romantic reminder of "The Legend," the woman who had been loved by the Emperor's only son?

When he had been on the throne only six years and the ghost had come to vigorous life in the person of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte who got himself cheered as "Napoleon" in a baby Robin-Hood sort of insurrection at Strasbourg, Louis-Philippe made the mistake of regarding the whole thing as the silly, romantic gesture it appeared on the surface to be. He paternally forgave the would-be Emperor and shipped him off to America to learn the sweet ways of Democracy. Then, only four years later, he must put on his melodramatic spectacle, "The Return of the Ashes," which not only gave courage to the Bonapartists but provoked Louis-Napoleon to another dynastic prank. Louis-Napoleon, upon hearing the news that the hero of "The Legend" was to receive his apotheosis, straightway planned another move towards claiming his heritage, and made his famous crossing of the Channel with, or without a live—and seasick—eagle on board. This time—when the conspirator landed at Boulogne with his "troops"—Louis-Philippe had him locked up.

Another mistake: for the day of the "Return of the Ashes" had stirred popular feeling beyond the hopes of even the most fanatical Bonapartist, and "The Legend" was now a flaming

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torch in the imaginations of thousands who had found themselves no better off after ten years under the "citizen King" than they had been under the Dictator—and far more bored.

Hungry for a spectacle in the good old imperial style, they had gone mad with hero-worship on that misty day when cavalry and infantry lined the Champs-Élysées from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile and, to the muffled beating of drums, the procession had wound its way through the Arch. Tears flowed and hearts beat fast when the funeral car, drawn by black horses completely caparisoned in silver-embroidered black velvet, had passed by and Paris had seen, beneath the towering catafalque covered with a purple velvet pall powdered with golden bees, the coffin on which were the cocked hat known to all the world, and the sword of Austerlitz.

In putting on this pageant had Louis-Philippe forgotten that a Channel separated his Latin subjects from the race that prided itself upon its "phlegm"? When the crowds that lined the Champs-Élysées on that day had wept at the sight of the shabby little cocked hat and the shining sword of victory, perhaps Louis-Philippe, as stage-manager of the show, had felt rewarded. As king of a nation which proved itself still ruled by a ghost he must have felt that perhaps this was his greatest mistake of all.

In the May sunshine the fragrance of the horse chestnuts and acacias triumphed for a while over the ancient smells of the medieval city that had not altered greatly since the days of Louis XIII. In smaller streets there were still open "kennels"

of filthy water which swelled to the size of small streams after a heavy rain and, as in the eighteenth century, bare-legged, strong-armed men still could make a living by carrying people across, ten centimes for a woman, five for a child or pet poodle.



The Jardin Mabille

A famous night-spot in the time of Louis-Philippe, where they danced the cancan in the light of thousands of gas-jets

In the morning the bankers and stockbrokers drove in their coupés and broughams to Tortoni's, where they chose their breakfast, English-fashion, from heated dishes spread out on a long buffet. In the afternoon there was a drive down the Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe, and later an apéritif at the Café Anglais, Very's, Véfours, the Café de Paris (not then on the Avenue de l'Opéra) or Philippe's in the Rue

de Montorgeuil (where Thackeray went for *bouillabaisse*).

At night there was the opera, or Racine and Rachel at the Comédie Française, or the performances at the Opéra Comique, or the Théâtre Italien, or one went to see the scandalous *Antony* of Alexandre Dumas in which the *beau ténébreux* declaims at the final curtain: "She resisted me. I have assassinated her!" Or one saw Hugo's socialistic *Ruys Blas*, in which a common man is actually portrayed as being more noble in character than the nobles.

After the theatre the sights might be seen at the Château des Fleurs, the Prado, the Closerie des Lilas, the Salle Valentino or the Chaumière where they danced the Robert Macaire. Or one went to the famous Jardin Mabille to watch the cancan. The Jardin Mabille (far more respectable than London's Vauxhall Gardens) had been made famous by Fanny Elssler and the daring new dance, the cancan. Here under the trees in the magical light of hundreds of gaslights, within glass globes or hanging from the ironwork "palms," or uncovered jets of naked, darting flame, all Paris gathered on clear nights: the *jeunesse*—and the *vieillesse—dorée*; the English tourists—their wives feeling deliciously wicked with their faces concealed by layer upon layer of dark veiling; students from the University; the military, and the respectable bourgeoisie *en famille*, stolidly listening to the music.

And there were the women, the deployed flanks of the army-of-the-evening, *jeunes filles en fleurs*, and full-bosomed veterans who had weathered the night life in the days of Napoleon I. In provocative groups, or marching majestically alone, the *dames aux camélias* moved through the crowd in

their luscious creations from Victoriene, or in confections made by the *petites couturières* after Gavarni's fashion plates—with



their narrow, sloping shoulders and small waists, they were doll-like in artful combinations of lace, ribbons, ostrich plumes, brocades, silks, satins, jewels and flowers, and long, fringed pointed Cashmere shawls with colorings like those of the finest antique enamels.

There was constant movement in the garden under the



*Top:* The cancan as danced by French Victorians  
*Bottom:* The "grand écart," or "the split," to the Victorians  
 the most shocking feature of the cancan

trees in the heat and wavering flame of the gaslights; the rustle of heavy silks, the thud of dancing feet, and the quick

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beat of the orchestra in Auber's lively tunes, or in the Baroque double movement of the cancan music; the odor of patchouly and rice powder mingling with the smells of wine and flowers and the open earth, and the bitumen in the new macadamized streets.

In but a short while the Jardin Mabille will be dark; the orchestra pavilion with its exotic form will be boarded up; there will be barricades across the streets, and the smell will be of gunpowder and blood and dead bodies. Eugène Sue's anonymous, mysterious Paris will have exploded into action; and Louis-Philippe, who had been hoisted over the barricades to the throne of France would leave it by the same way he came.

## IMPERIAL FAÇADE

WAS the Empress Eugénie the first woman to wear the enormously wide crinoline that was supported by a framework "cage"? If she was—they called her *la reine crinoline*—then this triumphant assertion of femininity that became an obligatory style during the fifties and sixties was her chief contribution to the decoration of the Second Empire. The period of Louis-Napoleon—even less than that of Louis-Philippe—produced little that it could rightly call its own. Its plagiarism was shameless, avid and indiscriminate. The designers of the Second Empire were for the most part able technicians content to "restore" and reproduce the great styles of the past. True to the Bonapartist creed, they "took their good where they found it."

"Napoleon III gives a fine imitation of royalty," his enemies said. The charge of imitating royalty could have been made against his designers with far more justice. Strangely enough, it was not the design of Napoléon le Grand that inspired those who created the background for Napoléon le Petit; they turned from the essentially masculine, soldierlike and austere forms of Napoleon I to the woman-inspired magnificence of Versailles. (The vogue for Louis XVI that continued all through the Second Empire, and which had a marked effect upon international design for two or three decades after the down-

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fall of Louis-Napoleon, arose from Eugénie's fixed idea that her life was mystically allied to that of Marie-Antoinette. The people did mock her behind her back with "foreigner" and "*l'Espagnole*" as they had mocked Marie-Antoinette with "*l'Autrichienne*," but there the similarity seems to have ended—apart from Eugénie's imitations of Marie-Antoinette's follies, and her cult for the Louis XVI.)

The Second Empire, in spite of its lack of striking originality, yet managed to impart a distinct flavor to its background, projecting—particularly in the latter part of the period—a character unmistakably its own. "Every century has had its personal grace," Baudelaire says. Each epoch, as well, usually has its "personal" grace. That of the Second Empire was inherent in the enormously wide crinoline, in the opulent *capitonnage*, which carried the *confort moderne* of the Louis-Philippard to great extremes, in the coquettish little gilt chairs with shaped backs and spindles, and even in the reproductions of the Louis XVI which occupied the talents of some of the best designers of the epoch.

If Louis-Napoleon was not, like his illustrious uncle, a fuse that ignited the creative spirit, he was no less a force in the contemporary currents of production, a force that operated through indirection and in a modern way: he was a man who did not stand in the way of creative ideas. Charles Baudelaire writes of the double movement of life in the sixties—"action and intention, dream and reality." "Who amongst us," he asks, "is not a duplex man?" This consciousness of a double current, this state of being two people at the same time, of facing both ways, like the famous spread movement of the





*Engraved after a photograph by Braun, Clément & Cie.*

The Empress Eugénie in her  
Spanish mantilla



*Courtesy, D. Appleton-Century Co.*

Napolcon III and Eugénie



*From a photograph by Georges Spangler*

The Empress Eugénie in 1863

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cancan, the *grand écart* (in English, more realistically known as "the split"), is peculiar to Romanticism. It is also the essence of the Baroque spirit. It characterizes many aspects of the Second Empire's "mental climate," and was strongly manifested in the Emperor himself.

Louis-Napoleon is a figure of great fascination, one of those endlessly conjectural personalities, like Mary Queen of Scots, which defy explanation through the accumulated facts. A character which would take on far greater validity if it could possibly be dissociated entirely from history and placed in romantic fiction where it seems rightly to belong. (Is the difficulty in understanding Louis-Napoleon due to the fact that he largely invented himself, and that he lacked great gifts as a creator of fiction?) To the English he was "the plotter and dreamer of Soho," and "the seedy adventurer who had gambled himself into a fortune." (Victoria, however, found him "an extraordinary man"—"fascinating, melancholy and engaging.") To the Legitimists and Orleanists he was an incarnation of the Bonaparte *démon*, a dangerous understudy of the Scourge of Europe, the "Attila of the French." To the Republicans he represented a tragic pause in the march of Liberty. (Karl Marx called him a "common felon," the Second Empire "a ferocious farce"). To women he was irresistible, a mysterious, fascinating lover who knew how to appreciate their beauty (perhaps his one manifestation of the esthetic sense) and who made them forget his own lack of it. To the people at large he was the great magician who produced *La Gloire*, decked out in tricolor streamers, from his stovepipe hat, and the leading actor in a dazzling spectacle



*From the Winterhalter portrait*

### Napoleon III

Victoria found him an extraordinary man, "fascinating, melancholy and engaging" . . .

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that was worth the exorbitant price of admission. In the long view of history it is quite easy to see him shrunk to the proportions of a daguerreotype, a *carte-de-visite* portrait of a Victorian in queer clothes, with a canceled face accented in the lower part by a striking "T," like one of Daumier's decisive blacks on white.

And yet it is not so easy as all that: behind the blank, Imperial mask with the "extinguished eyes" there is another face—a modern one. In his long years of prison at Ham, Louis-Napoleon outlined his day of glory in great, swirling flourishes, and then carefully filled in all the moves and countermoves until he had a perfected creation, one that could not fail; only, like many another author of a long-incubated plot, he overlooked the most formidable possibility for failure of all—the elements of mutability in the world he meant to conquer.

All his movements were made according to the plan conceived in the fortress at Ham, and it seemed to be perfect. He carried off the *coup d'état*: he became Emperor. Immediately he was made Emperor he effaced all souvenirs of the plodding, business-man's government of Louis-Philippe. The military had their spines stiffened with new discipline, and their persons made a part of the theme of glory by magnificent uniforms—thousands of horses' tails waved from thousands of shining helmets above brightly colored tunics heavy with gold braid. At the gates of the Tuileries the drums beat and there was a flourish of trumpets to mark the Emperor's comings and goings. And there were always cheers (what if some of them were from a *claque*?) of "*Vive l'Emper-eurr-rr!*" After departing to Cayenne those who "were not in political agree-

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ment" with him, the old, loose, muddling bureaucracy was tightened and sharpened into a compact instrument, shaped to one man's hand. When Napoleon III rode through the Arc de Triomphe at the head of his victorious army all France knew that it had a master.

Yet all the time, Louis-Napoleon's intelligence, under pressure from the hidden forces of contemporary life, was building up another man, one who apprehended the co-responsibility of nations in supporting Western civilization, who realized that classic Rome was dead, that the day of war by conquest was past, that the eighteenth century had been outlived and that the steam and gas engine, and the electric wire had created a new type of workman who could not much longer be dealt with in the old way. A "duplex man," he was not big enough to cast off his first man, and he was powerless against the other.

We see him at the head of a fantastic Court, a dictator both inspired and blundering in his politics, surrounded by hate and suspicion, betrayed by those he had the most right to trust, enigmatical to even his intimates, to even himself, a confused despot forever trying to reconcile his two faces, the classic and the modern.

It was only four years after his *coup d'état* that Louis-Napoleon, the Imperial mask in shadow and the modern face in full view, opened his great Universal Exposition on the Champs-Élysées, patterned after the 1851 World's Fair in Hyde Park. Dedicated to industrial progress and the amity between nations (when the exhibition opened, France, England and Russia were at war in the Crimea!) the Exposition

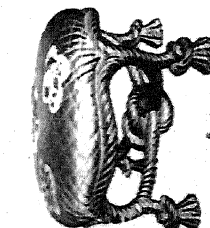
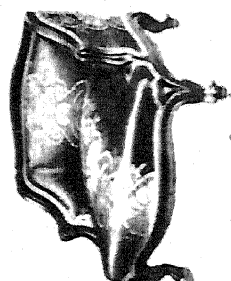
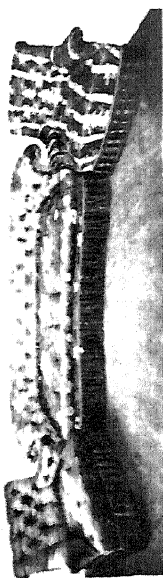
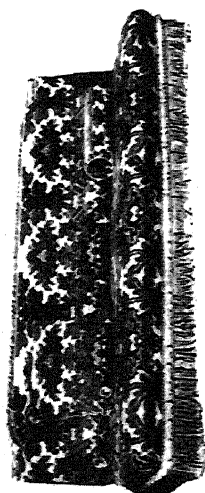
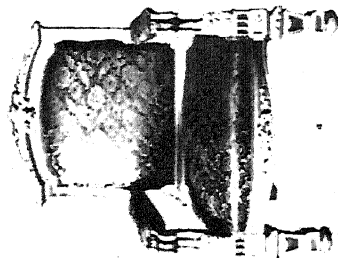
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of 1855 was, in reality, a demonstration on a large and ambitious scale of the coming supremacy of the common man.

In the huge *Palais de l'Industrie*—it was built on a far greater scale than the Crystal Palace—*M. Prudhomme*, the average bourgeois citizen, could see the world of tomorrow spread out before him; all the products of the new machines which, it was promised, would make his life more comfortable, more enjoyable, and more beautiful than that of royalty in other days. The subtle power of publicity, so little understood even a short while back when Balzac was one of the first to employ it, has begun to be appreciated by Government.

The *Palais de l'Industrie*, *M. Prudhomme* is told, is “the temple of the future” in which the new and shining god of Materialism is enthroned, guarded by *la grande armée industrielle* whose battle hymn is *Bon Marché*. *Bon Marché*—everything for little in this enticing array of objects that can be commanded from the factories. Here are pile carpets whose colors are as bright and whose designs are as rich as those in the houses of the *noblesse*; English cotton has made it possible for *M. Prudhomme* to walk as softly in his home as the aristocrat whose floors are covered with Aubussons. Handsome stuffs are displayed for curtains and portières and furniture coverings—velours and satin and silk and good, serviceable reps, with long fringes of chenille and worsted, and long, thick tassels. *Bon Marché!* Or, still cheaper: gay “Persians” which can be draped on walls, ceiling and furniture to turn the modest boudoir of *Mme Bovary* into a paradise as fairy-like as that of *Marguerite Gautier*.

The glory of Versailles itself has been brought within reach



Capitonnage at Saint-Cloud

*Courtesy, Editions Nilsson, Paris*

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of the upper bourgeoisie in the new Louis XVI, "*Louis XVI-l'Impératrice*" it is called, with imitations of the master-works of Riesener, Carlin, and Oeben, factory made, and ingeniously combined with simulated materials. Even great lustres, like those that blaze at Versailles and Fontainebleau, can be obtained for the salon of *M. Prudhomme*, where their cast crystals will shine with almost equal splendor. For his mantelpiece ornaments there are clocks and statuettes and candlesticks of cast zinc, or of imitation marble. (Even the great Barye, who is to the animal world what Balzac is to the human, has succumbed to the god of Materialism and is making small objects, figurines, candlesticks, candelabras and vases to be cast in quantities and distributed through commercial channels.)

New processes have perfected the plate-glass mirror which brings an air of luxury to modest homes. It has been responsible for the popularity of new types of furniture: hat stands for entrance halls, chiffoniers for bedrooms, low consoles to be placed between windows, and the psyché which has become a fashionable necessity; it also completes the boudoir toilet table draped in "skirts" of satins, laces, velvets and silks, and decorated with fringe, and bows and swags of ribbon.

Furniture pieces that are heavily *capitoné* (in England this is bluntly called "stuffed goods") have continued to develop since the modest beginnings in the time of Louis-Philippe; these sofas and chairs, heavily over-stuffed, are a forcible reminder to *M. Prudhomme* that his day has come, that the long, hard way to his present position of prosperity can be forgotten in the comfort of his reasonably cheap padded furniture. He has earned his ease, he feels, so let his furni-



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ture be as crammed full of stuffing as a Vienna sausage, and let it be covered in brightly colored stuffs, soft to the touch, and let it ooze fringes and tassels that no stark framework may show—he has had enough of austerity.

There are over-stuffed *poufs*, more elaborate in shape now than in the days of the July Monarchy, surmounted by white-marble statues, potted plants, or tall, gilded candelabras; and there are the new types in the *capitonnage*, the “toad” chair, the *confidants* and the *tête-à-têtes*, and the *causeuses*—which are complicated, writhing triple “S-shaped” settees. (Renan sees disaster ahead for a middle-class that has taken to lolling about on too comfortable furniture; he objects to it not only on philosophical grounds, but esthetically as well—“*la commodité exclut le style*,” he says; but no one listens.)

Painted papers have become cheaper and more attractive since the days of *Le Retour des Cendres*. M. Prudhomme, if he has his mind made up to furnish a certain type of coquettish boudoir like those in the glittering new *hôtels privés* on the Champs-Élysées, can buy, at a modest price, a stamped or printed paper which is an exact replica of tufted silk with colored-glass buttons. Or he can cover his walls with paper “tapestries” printed in twenty-four colors, after the opulent paintings of modern masters—the *Chasse en Fôret* of Desportes, the *Pierrot* of Couture, the *Bacchante* of Clésinger, or the various Births and Triumphs of Venus, the Phrynes, Auroras, Judgements of Paris and other allegorical paintings by Baudry, Cabanel, and Bouguereau in which voluptuously beautiful models, with the aid of a few symbols, appear as goddesses and muses. (The chaste Amazon who floated se-

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renely through the decorative painting of the First Empire has been eclipsed by the blonde houri of the Second Empire, more provocative even than her sister of the eighteenth century. While the soldierly First Empire, in its leisure moments, preferred to see *la femme* as a slim and virile figure bearing trophies of victory, the banker and the broker of the mid-nineteenth century preferred to be stimulated by visions of not-too-classical Elysian Fields.)

In ornamental metal the new facilities of the factory, new machines and the development of the "galvanoplastic" process, have brought to *M. Prudhomme's* home articles that were once only for the châteaux and palaces; ornamental bases for carcel lamps, "Etruscan vases," and mantelpiece garnitures of cast iron (gilded), false bronze and brass. But the most popular of all the new metal work is the "silver" produced by the process invented by Ruolz of the Maison Christofle, and usually called by his name. With this electroplating process, "silver" services are within the reach of every household with any pretensions to luxury. (Louis-Napoleon, in an unaccustomed mood of economy, and doubtless wishing to display his democracy and his modernism, ordered the House of Christofle to make him a service of *ruolz* for the Tuileries that was composed of several hundreds of pieces. "The silver of rulers is made to be finally melted down," he said. *His* became a pool of molten metal in the firing of the Tuileries!)

*M. Prudhomme, bouche béante* among the wonders of the *Bon Marché* section of the Exhibition has, on the whole, a better time of it than the bankers and brokers and their wives, and the *dames aux camélias* among the *beaux meubles*. Here

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is the design of the period at its most turgid and pretentious. The royal factories of Sèvres, Gobelins and Beauvais are represented, it is true, and there are pieces—some of them antique—covered with beautiful textiles from the Gobelins, Savonnerie and Aubusson factories which express the old traditions instilled with the new, enterprising spirit of the Second Empire. But tradition and the new spirit have not met happily in the spectacular creations that are considered among the marvels of the Exhibition; the gun cabinet, for example, made by Jeanselme for Napoleon III, a piece laden with meaningless, over-worked ornaments of carved wood, and which has, on either side of the lower section, two carved wooden dogs, life-size and held to the body of the piece by chains! And there is the *buffet-étagère* by Ribaillier. The upper part of this is carved with the portraits of four hundred famous men, from Plato to Victor Hugo, and the lower part is composed of pedestals representing four great nations. The United States is one of them, represented by the figure of a woman clinging to an anchor, which is the symbol of her mercantile marine.

And there are other elaborate creations; Second-Empire Boulle cabinets and *bureaux des dames*; *Louis XVI-l'Impératrice* wardrobes decorated with ormolu; rosewood bureaus and bedsteads with plaques of painted Sèvres and Limoges porcelain; gilded guéridons with crimson velvet tops; two-legged gilded consoles that have become more bloated and Baroque since the days of Louis-Philippe; and pieces in the style of the late Renaissance, with molded volutes and incised circles, masks and arabesques, made of oak, ash, or pearwood, darkened by acid, or occasionally left in the natural color and

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heightened here and there with red paint—a fashion that was considered extremely effective.

Modeled upon the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851, the Paris Universal Exposition of 1855 was not only intended as a program of publicity to win the *petite-bourgeoisie* to the Second Empire, but as a gesture to impress England with the importance of French manufacture. With her earlier adoption of the machine and her developments in technics, England had outdistanced France in the industrial arts. Prices were lowered after the Exhibition got under way, and special workmens' trains were run, inducements to the French craftsman to come to the Exhibition and see for himself the work of his brothers in other lands—particularly in England. (Every effort had been made by Government to bring art to the people. Museums in France had been opened free to the public for many years; and in a little over six years the State would open free Schools of Design that would be far superior to those of England—which were not free—and of other countries as well.)

A French writer in the early sixties says, "Some of us have got into the senseless habit of belittling everything made in France, and praising everything made in England." "We must," he goes on to say in a style of rather strained optimism, "call upon our manufacturers to employ special artists to produce signed pieces; this is all that is necessary to give a new élan to our ornamental arts, and to restore to France her supremacy in matters of taste which is really not seriously threatened—*least of all by England!*"

When, in August, Victoria and Albert visited the Paris

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Exposition, Victoria, with evident satisfaction, writes in her journal: "England and the Colonies make a very fine show, and our china pleases very much."

With equally evident satisfaction, Napoleon III presents Victoria with a new masterpiece from the Sèvres factory, a porcelain vase with a sunset painted after Ruysdael by Langlacé. Albert receives a vase also, a piece from the Sèvres factory "representing the Exhibition of 1851," which Victoria calls "a *chef-d'œuvre* in every sense of the word." Albert also is given a neat Meissonier, *La Rixe*, which, according to Victoria was "the finest thing in the exhibition." Had she, on the way to the Palais de Beaux-Arts, seen the make-shift shed directly opposite, where a "wild man" crouched among his canvases in the first "*Salon des Réfusés*," and a one-man revolt against the chains of the Academy? What, one wonders, would she have said of *Les Casseurs de Pierre*, *Les Cribleurs de Blé*, and the *Enterrement à Ornans*? Probably she would have agreed with the others who happened to stray into the rebel exhibition, that this painter—the sign on the door of his improvised gallery read: "*Le Réalisme—G. Courbet*"—was a dauber ignorant of the rules of painting, that the mission of art was to elevate and to bring joy, and that it was immoral to paint human beings in a way that made them look as untidy, as stupid, as preoccupied and as commonplace as they look in real life in their off-moments. Napoleon III did not take his royal visitors to see the work of the defiant artist; he did not know very much about art, and it is doubtful if any work of art ever appealed to him—music he frankly disliked, particularly the "theme-song" of the Second Empire,

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the *Partant pour la Syrie* composed by his mother—but he knew, in his uncanny way of being able to appreciate the value of things he did not understand, that the exhibition of the rebel artist was there. Later on, when there were other flaming spirits who painted in opposition to the formulæ of the accepted Meissoniers, Gérômes and Cabanels, he authorized the first official “*Salon des Réfusés*.”

But Victoria did not miss seeing much else. She notes it all down in her journal, even the furniture which has been placed, from the Garde Meuble of the State, in the Petit Trianon, and which “was frequently of that period of the Empire *qui à un cachet tout particulier*, and of which Mama had much at Kensington, so that I recognized in many places old acquaintances in bureaux, tables, presses, &, also counterparts of things which we have at Windsor, in china, and in furniture of the time of Louis XV, and Louis XVI. . . .”

Victoria is delighted with everything. Paris bewilders but “enchants” her. She reaches her standard of taste by comparison with things at home—like a good Bostonian. “The Emperor has pretty barouches, rather smaller than ours, and bay horses harnessed just like ours.” The banks of the Seine near Neuilly she thought “very pretty, and remind one of Richmond.” In a letter to Stockmar she praises “the laying out of the ornamental grounds in the Bois de Boulogne, which really may be said to vie with the finest English parks.”

A few days before the Queen and Prince Albert must leave France, as she sits in the Empress’ little study listening to the military band playing down below among the horse chestnuts and orange trees in the Tuileries gardens, while the sun sets

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behind the Arc de Triomphe, she feels quite "*wehmüthig* and melancholy." She thinks of how recently blood has flowed in this beautiful Paris, and "how uncertain is everything still."

And yet, she feels, "the Emperor seems so fit for his place." (Louis Napoleon's famous charm for women had not failed with Victoria.) "Who ever could have thought," she writes—how one loves her for these commonplace exclamations of wonder at the miraculous events of a world "strange and wonderful indeed"—"who ever could have thought that this man, this Emperor . . . whose life had been so chequered, could . . . become not only the staunchest *ally* and friend of England, but our personal friend!"

*Vive la reine d'Angleterre!* In the next fifteen years, wily Albion, gracefully and subtly, and with the finest of motives, will abandon this "staunch friend" and "*ally*" of England as he struggles with disaster.



### CHAPTER THREE

## FANDANGO

IF IT was Louis-Napoleon who invented himself, it was the cynical, worldly, disenchanted romantic, Prosper Mérimée, who invented the Empress Eugénie. Next to *Carmen* she was his most celebrated heroine. (He also collaborated on that incredible extravaganza, *The Life of the Court in the Second Empire*, the action of which took place in many scenes—at the Tuileries, at Compiègne, at Saint-Cloud, Fontainebleau and Versailles—with scenario by Mérimée, assisted by Alexandre Dumas,  *fils*; music by Johann Strauss and Waldteufel; settings by Haussmann, assisted by a large corps of architects, artists and designers which included Viollet-le-Duc,



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Lefuel, Visconti, Rossigneux, Grohé, Klagman, Carrier-Belleuse, Fourdinois, Liénard, Christofle *frères*, Froment-Meurice, Alexandre, Carpeaux, Baudry and Cabanel. Consulting stylists: Winterhalter and the Princess de Metternich. Costumes, of course, by "Papa" Worth.)

In the beginning he had planned his play for his heroine after the pattern of the old Spanish drama: he had all the stock characters at hand—the beautiful, worldly, scheming mother, the charming and still more beautiful daughter, the *bon parti*, slightly shop-worn, but yet a prize, the philosophical friend (himself) who comments, in asides, about the play for the benefit of the audience, and a group of sinister characters who hover about making trouble for the happy pair—most of them relations of the *bon parti*. Given a dozen or so of the most alluring women in France, music by Rossini, and a free list which included all the crowned heads of Europe, the play promised great success. The first act went off very well and the heroine was duly married, with great rejoicing, to the *bon parti*. Mérimée, who relished with ironic and *raffiné* humor any undertaking that allowed him to indulge in his gift for mockery (with Ampère, the physicist, he had once planned to write a book of travel—*before* seeing the places to be described) composed the letters sent by Eugénie to Louis-Napoleon at a time when the Emperor gave every sign of wanting merely to add Mlle de Montijo to the long list of his mistresses. (The notorious and rich Miss Howard, whom Louis-Napoleon had met at Lady Blessington's in England, was still in the background when the engagement was announced.) Written with an uncanny knowledge of the psychology of

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Don Juans in general, and of Louis-Napoleon in particular, Mérimée's letters snared the heart of the man who was proud of both his knowledge of women and of *belles-lettres*. A woman who was so supremely beautiful and who could, at the same time, command such a prose style, was surely worthy of nothing less than an Imperial crown.

But after the successful finale of the first act, Mérimée's heroine got out of hand. What could be done with a character that developed the impossible habit of appearing as many other characters as well? How could he keep his heroine to the hieratic rôle he had written for her—a woman more lucky than Cleopatra since she was coeval with her Shakespeare? A crinolined goddess would receive the guests at a ball at the Tuileries, an unbelievably lovely vision in white satin, lace and diamonds—diamonds about her neck, her waist, and in her auburn hair—a billowing vision of fragile stuffs and sparkling jewels that walked between the walls of Cent Gardes standing on either side in their famous, lifeless immobility, splendid in their sky-blue tunics, buckskins and jackboots, shining helmets and cuirasses which reflected the glitter of her diamonds as she passed. A goddess who caused a hushed moment of admiration when she made her famous curtsy, a movement of indescribable grace, imperial and humble, proud and feminine. (But was it, perhaps, a little *too* perfect? Was there something here of the professional grace of the theatre, a something more and less regal than royalty?)

And then—it might be only a few weeks later—the goddess appears, in the mountains near Biarritz, wearing a red flannel "Garibaldi" blouse, a short black silk skirt (there is a red flannel

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one beneath it) and a Spanish hat with pompoms, and, when native musicians play a Spanish tune, dances a fandango before a startled but respectfully admiring Court.

And there were other rôles. There was the Marie-Antoinette rôle which sent Mérimée's heroine into the shops of dubious *brocanteurs* in search of antiques of the time of Louis XVI (when the manufacturers were panting to sell her products of the Second Empire!); or which led her into playing dairymaid in the park of "Villeneuve-L'Étang" where the Emperor had built her a little Swiss dairy à la Petit Trianon, and where the *bêtises* of the eighteenth century were repeated with the heavier touch of the nineteenth.

"I doubt if there has ever been an age where society was sillier than it is now," Prosper Mérimée said on one occasion; but in spite of his feeling of superiority to his times, he was an indefatigable collaborator in the Second Empire extravaganza, and half the "romping games," charades, *tableaux vivants*, guessing games and practical jokes indulged in by the Court were the creations of his weary and cynical brain.

There was the *gamine* rôle assumed at masked balls given at the Austrian Embassy where, "disguised" in several different dominoes during the evening, the Empress amused herself (if no one else) in playing childish pranks upon the guests. And there was the blue-stocking who interrupted beautifully artificial conversations with quotations from Fourier. And the believer in spiritualism who gathered a group of intimates about her in a darkened room where Home, the mesmerist and medium (he was also suspected of being a German spy) produced table-rappings, messages from the other world, and

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clammy hands of the departed. (On one occasion when the Empress was told that the icy "spirit" hand that had touched her's was a very earthly foot she refused to believe it.)

And, as if this giddy versatility of his heroine was not enough to try the patience of any author, there was the most exasperating rôle of all—the dominant woman of affairs who controlled the destiny of nations, a part patterned after Catherine of Russia and Maria-Theresa. (When Regent, the Empress took this rôle with such seriousness that, with her confusion of Imperialism, Romanticism, Saint-Simonism and Catholicism, she managed to speed the Empire on its road to tragedy.)

But there was her beauty to almost compensate for her infuriating instability—and she was so very beautiful! Only one woman among the many that surrounded the Emperor ("Some men pursue women," he said, "but in my case it is the other way round, and sometimes I fall") was more beautiful; this was the dazzling Countess de Castiglione. But she was a cold, inhuman masterpiece who might have inspired the lines by Baudelaire:

*"Je trône dans l'azur comme un sphinx incompris,  
J'unis un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes;  
Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,  
Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris."*

Eugénie, with her Spanish, French, and Scottish blood, had the contradictions and the imperfections that make beauty entrancing and strange. (Disraeli said she had "Chinese eyes.") She was a Baroque masterpiece—all graceful, buoyant curves arching from an empty center.

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A Strauss waltz heard through acacia trees in a moonlit garden in late summer; the sound of water falling in distant fountains; of carriage wheels on a gravel roadway; the smell of Parma violets—these things evoke visions of those years that mark the full ripening of the Romantic era in France. Visions of ballrooms with deeply coved ceilings from which hang crystal chandeliers with hundreds of lights that shine down on lovely women in dresses admirably designed for their soft bodies whose shoulders seem to have no bones—they have never known the rigors of outdoor sports. Swirling from their artificially small waists, the heavy crinolines act as pedestals for the works of art that are the head and shoulders. (The hair gleams with diadems and jewelled pins, but it may also be decorated with fanciful headdresses, of ostrich feathers, crests of *blondes*, flowers, grapes, sheaves of wheat, oats, dyed fir cones, silvered grasses, black lace, butterflies and even “humming birds and their nests.”)

Visions of the Champs-Élysées and the Bois de Boulogne at the fashionable hour in the late afternoon when the barouches, landaus, coupés, broughams, phaetons, breaks, drags, Tilburys, d’Orsays, and victorias are driving back and forth in the misty atmosphere. (On the rare occasions when there is snow there will be sleighs on the frosty drives of the Bois de Boulogne, fantastic creations like those of the gaudiest carousel; they are in the forms of swans, bulls, horses, deer and strange monsters, painted in bright colors, gilded, silvered and bronzed. The horses wear bright-colored harness covered with bells and metal disks, and crimson and yellow plumes wave from their heads. A lovely woman flashes past, only her face showing be-

tween dark masses of fur, a tinkling, jingling, many-colored apparition, like a child's vision of an immortal in some sugar-frosted fairyland.) Somewhere on the Avenue de l'Impératrice, or hidden in the depths of the Bois, Constantin Guys will be making rapid sketches of the carriages as they pass. They are his passion; and as the painter of sailing ships notes down every detail of line and rigging, Guys records every detail in the construction of these delicately fashioned vehicles



*From a drawing by Crafty*

### French polo in the eighties

which are triumphs of the carriage-maker's art. As a poet, he recreates them in all their "mysterious and complex grace," and scientifically, he notes, according to his friend and admirer, Baudelaire, "the series of geometrical figures which, in rapid succession, they produce in space."

Visions of the spectators gathered for the Grand Prix at Longchamps, who stir with excitement when the bugles blow and the yellow Imperial carriage appears, and the Empress steps down to cause a sensation among the women with her mauve costume by Worth, worn with a mauve bonnet trimmed with white feathers, a mauve gauze veil over her face, and

carrying a parasol of mauve moiré silk bordered with white marabout.

Visions of the house parties at the Imperial residences in the country. The scene, worthy of the sharp pen of Forain, when the precious crinolines arrive in the courtyard at Compiègne. Each dress—some of them are eight and ten yards wide—which cannot be folded, and yet must arrive in perfect condition, is packed in a separate wooden case. All day long the baggage



After a drawing by Crafty

#### Polo in the Bois

Striped polo shirts were worn in imitation of the English

vans arrive with their fragile cargo, eight and nine hundred boxes, each eagerly awaited by a gesticulating, hysterical lady's maid who wars with bewildered footmen in the frantic effort to be the first to get her mistress' cases. The dresses, at last sorted out and in the possession of their owners, are worn for a few hours during the visit of the "*série*" at the Imperial house. They make small islands of loveliness, like flowering bushes, in the old rooms where the furnishings of the *Ancien Régime* have been pushed back against the walls, crowded out by the "modern" pedestal tables with their thick "S-shaped" supports, the tables

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with sled-like runners, gouty *confortables* and *poufs*, and frail, gilded occasional chairs. If it rains, and the dresses cannot be taken into the open, they flutter prettily back and forth in games of shuffle-board, or balance rhythmically from side to side in waltzes, redowas and quadrilles, played, drearily enough, by a mechanical piano.

Or visions of Fontainebleau in mid-June when the privileged "*série*" play at fishing in the lake where Eugénie, in her Venetian gondola, glides back and forth with some chosen companion. (She believes that conversation is never so charming as when "one is cradled on the water in a gondola.") And at Fontainebleau in the evening, after a long day of combined "etiquette and fantasy" when there is a tendency to yawn and to watch the clock, Prosper Mérimée and Alexandre Dumas, *filis*, will arouse a kind of grateful animation by organizing a questions-and-answers game in which the Emperor and the Empress join (without greatly distinguishing themselves).

Or a vision of the Théâtre Italien on the night when the seats were filled with fashionable society who had come to hear the music of a new composer, sponsored by the Princess de Metternich, the acknowledged leader of taste and fashion. This music, by the German composer, Wagner, was like the booming of cannon and the red, glaring sky of a battlefield in some nightmare of infernal war. Baroque in its essence, it contained, nevertheless, the rhythms of a spiritual outlander, intolerable to this audience composed of romantic materialists living in graceful Baroque fantasy. They laughed, and then they hissed, and then the crinolines indignantly whirled out of the theatre, followed by the black coat tails. The next morning,



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and for many mornings to come, the nightmare music was the subject of all conversations. *Tannhäuser* had caused, Baudelaire said, "*des fureurs, des cris, des discussions.*" Indignation was the inflammation that had set up as a result of a painful wound, for somewhere in this music there was a hostile force that had dealt a blow. Those antimelodic brasses had struck against the breast like the metal-heeled boots of marching soldiers. Those raucous cries of trumpet and clarinet and oboe were the savage voices of the untamed Teutonic North. *Tannhäuser*, Baudelaire said, was "the music of the future."

The pattern of life established by the Empress and her court was imitated by those in the world of finance, and by the upper bourgeoisie, from whom it sifted down through the ranks of the *petite-bourgeoisie*, and, indirectly, to the mass of the people themselves. It was a life of "rapid dresses and rowdy ways," according to an English writer of the time. The democratization of wealth, and the Imperial policy of spending money in order to improve the standard of living, had brought into being the first enormous department stores organized on modern lines. (The years from 1852 to 1869 saw the opening of the Bon Marché, the Louvre, the Printemps and the Samaritaine.) With this new outlet for distribution which, at the same time, created a new demand for low-priced objects of all kinds, the manufacturers were given the impetus to produce large quantities of goods (including, of course, house furnishing in all its classifications) which soon lost all quality of individual craftsmanship and original design.

Following the Imperial model of "*pompe et panache*," the

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important bankers and brokers, and business men, commanded for themselves interiors in which the keynote was gold, gold bright and shining on walls, ceilings, mirrors and furniture. And, with gold and crimson, white was used—to make the gold more glittering, the crimson more striking.

It was during the Second Empire that the convention was established of giving each room a distinct character through the use of certain types of materials. The salon, besides its gold leaf, should have damasks and tapestries, bright in tone; the dining room and library should be soberer in tone with dark velvets and darker tapestries; the boudoir should have silks and tissues and light-colored satins. Marquetries, inlaid ebony and Boullework were for salon and boudoir, whereas in other rooms buffets and cabinets of sculptured oak and walnut were preferred.

During the period, designers contrived elaborate creations in sculptured wood, pretentious works of art that exuded what William Morris once described as “sham, naturalistic platitude.” One of the most prolific in ambitious, naturalistic designs was E. Liénard, who offered surrealistic mural and furniture designs that combined realistic birds, fruit, vines, vegetables, lions, lizards, sloths, mice, elephants, boars, dogs, turkeys, fish, and mythological monsters in astounding compositions that sometimes also included complete kitchen, fishing and hunting gear. Liénard composed striking friezes; one of the most remarkable of these was an egg-and-dart variation in which a realistic egg was combined in a repeat pattern with a “dart” of folded napery. Another frieze had for motifs realistic turnips. A cornice decoration by this designer had eggs on a plate with knife, fork and spoon, and also an eggcup, with asparagus and

artichokes, wild rabbits and turkeys, combined in a kind of guilloche pattern formed by folded tablecloths! Liénard's furniture and chimney pieces were all heavily carved in ultra-real-



Victorian "Greek"

"Aurora" wardrobe designed by Diehl of Paris

istic motifs. He designed a startling sideboard with carvings of trophies of the chase, lobsters, fishes and pheasants combined with palmette and acanthus ornaments, and decorated with finials in the form of various fruits.

Since the day of the July Monarchy when rosewood and

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mahogany were the chief woods employed in cabinet making, other woods had come into use; violet wood, *bois de rose* (not rosewood) gray maple, amboyna, cedar, *lentisque* (an exotic gumwood) and thuya. Thuya, a re-discovery of Second Empire cabinet makers, was a favorite for marquetry-work, for which purpose, with its golden brown color, its moiré marking, and its firmness of fibre, it was an excellent material.

New fabrics were also made during the period; besides the imitation Beauvais and Aubussons produced by the factories at Neuilly, and the imitations of Persian and India prints, there were coarse gray canvases manufactured for the walls of libraries, smoking-rooms and game-rooms, and which were usually decorated with patterns in woollen braid.

Of far greater influence upon manufacture and decoration than the well-to-do bourgeoisie, or than even the Imperial Family, was the gilded half-world that had become larger and more extravagant since the comparatively unsophisticated days of Louis-Philippe. New fortunes made in speculation were a rich harvest for the *Marguerite Gautiers* of the Second Empire. The modest refinements of luxury that astonished the duchesses who attended the auction sale of her possessions after the death of *Camille* (Dumas' heroine was of Louis-Philippe's day) were eclipsed by the magnificence of *les biches* who lived like Oriental princesses in the mechanically handsome new buildings on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, and the new sections of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the Parc Monceau and Cour-la-Reine. The newly-made Paris, spacious and orderly, and well-planned to the point of monotony, that was the triumph of

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Louis-Napoleon's minister, Baron Haussmann, was a splendid background for the luxurious life of the *demi-monde*. Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, after giving the Parisians the sentimental *Dame aux Camélias* gave them the convenient term "*demi-monde*" when his moralistic play of that name appeared three years after the dramatization of *Camille*. The *courtisanes sans cœur* who were preying upon rich men were also glorified (and also in the interests of morality) in the sensational *Filles de Marbre* of Barrière and Lambert-Thiboust.

They lived in surroundings far more ornate than the private apartments of the Empress at the Tuileries. For them were fashioned the most Churriguerresque dressers and cabinets in the neo-Renaissance style, the most Baroque of the bulging, gilded consoles with tops of violently colored marbles, the most be-decorated Boulle, the most voluptuous mural paintings by Baudry, the most complicated and deeply padded and longest fringed sofas and *poufs* and *confortables*. For them the designers invented new designs in fantastic occasional pieces in lacquered papier-mâché incrustated with silver and bronze and mother-of-pearl, "Oriental" folding chairs decorated with black satin and passementerie, and stands and tables in bamboo that had a "*chic particulier*." From Alexandre, the *fournisseur* to "high-lif" they ordered exquisite fans "sculpted" and painted by well-known artists and decorated with Chantilly and Valenciennes lace. Complicated jewelry pieces in Renaissance and neo-Greek designs were fashioned by E. Froment-Meurice, the son of "*le Cellini romantique*," and presented to the *filles de marbre* by hopeful bankers, in bonbon boxes of repoussé silver, or in golden Easter eggs incrustated with semiprecious stones. In imitation

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of the Prince Napoleon, the anachronistic Roman senator among the Bonapartes who lived in a strange world of classic hate like a character in Racine or Corneille (he was a lover of the tragic actress, Rachel) and who had had a neo-Greek palace built for him on the Avenue Montaigne, the *filles de marbre* developed a cult for neo-Greek surroundings. In imitation of the Empress they ordered Louis XVI furniture from the Empress' talented designer, Grohé. On the mantelpieces in their salons and boudoirs were vases of delicate enamels on brass. On their carved and gilded tables with the classical urn upheld by rising stretchers were bibelots in highly polished marquetry, tortoise shell inlaid with gold, lacquered papier-mâché studded with silver-gilt and jewels, damascened vases, and imitation English faïence. And, in red plush and silver-gilt frames, there would be photographs by Disdéri and Nadar, and the latest model in stereopticons with views of St. Marks in Venice, the Coliseum and St. Peters in Rome, the Uffizi in Florence, mountain climbers in the Alps, and perhaps Nadar's views of the catacombs of Paris, or his aerial pictures taken from his balloon. (There might also be found in the salons of the most successful *filles de marbre* the new Dubroni apparatus with its *pipette*, a "small instrument by means of which you can introduce into the camera obscura, through a little orifice, the different chemical baths which the plate must undergo previous to its bearing a picture." Everyone who could afford to was buying these "liliputian apparatuses" which were "turning photography into a drawing-room amusement within reach of every purse.")

Of the *fille de marbre*, Charles Baudelaire wrote: "She has

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invented a new elegance, provocative and barbaric." Later, Verlaine wrote of his enchantress, "Marco":

*"Sur ces cheveux roux un charme glissait;  
Sa robe rendait d'étranges musiques  
Quand Marco passait."*

Hausmann's rejuvenated Paris wore these *filles sans cœur* like beautiful, exotic flowers that had grown up out of the filth of the old city to cling to the strength in the new. Their diamonds and perfumes, their birds of paradise and their Oriental shawls, and their striking costumes were everywhere in the bright gaslight of the *cafés chantants*, the theatres, the Opera Balls, and even the Opera itself where they sat as near as possible to the Imperial Court and the bankers' wives, and flaunted their copies of Worth's dresses while they listened to the new "Swedish nightingale," Christina Nilsson, or Patti, "la Diva."

"Paris is wonderful, mad and fantastic," Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand. "Can we be going back to the old Orient?" *Partant pour la Syrie, le brave et jeune Dunois!*

An English writer of the period describes the setting of a discreet Second Empire *élégante* which, he confesses, manifests the "ruling passion of our time, and yet it has something more, something that reveals individual thought and gives almost vitality." The dining-room, which has "an atmosphere which we do not breathe often elsewhere," is "all dark-brown cloth and ebony; but the weakened daylight which struggles in through the heavy curtains finds resting-places and mark-points

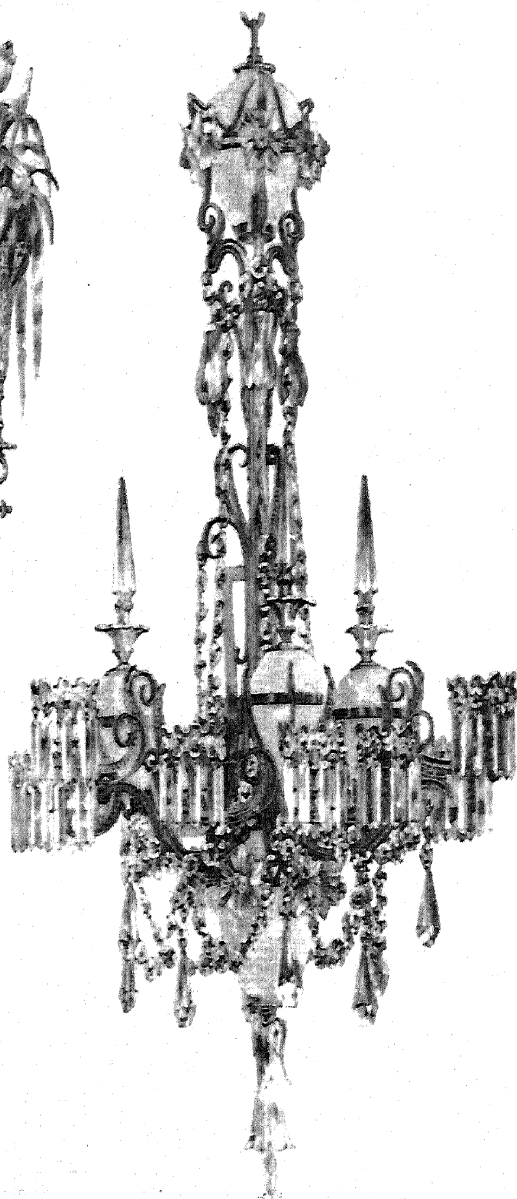
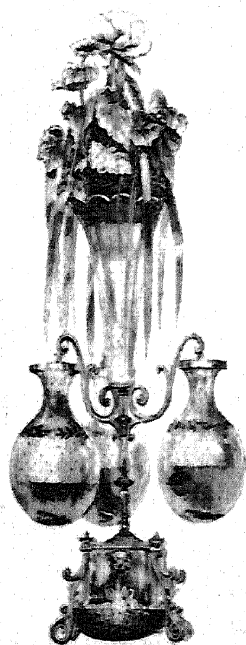
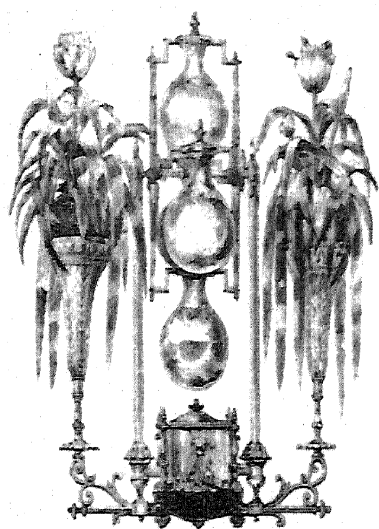
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on the old faïence which stands upon the dresser, on the steel hinges of the sideboards [William Morris and Eastlake wafted to a *hôtel privé* on the Champs-Élysées!] and flickers vaguely on the yellow and dull blue of the hanging lamp. Brown walls set in black beading frame in the room." The salons of this ideal apartment are painted in a color somewhere between a fading China rose and ripe Indian corn. Chairs "of varied shapes," all comfortable, "stand about in pleasant irregularity." They are covered in various materials "embroidered with fantastic flowers of every hue." There are also plants with variegated leaves, "a workbasket from which skeins of wool are cunningly allowed to overflow"—for the sake of color—and a "laced handkerchief left trailing in the angle of a sofa."

In the bedroom, he tells us, "the walls, the hangings, the seats, are all in pale-blue satin (she is fair) edged sparingly with velvet of the same shade and embroidered with pale moss-rose buds." In this room, which the writer says is "filled with vague, floating grace," the bed is "shrouded in thickly wadded satin curtains, inside which hang others, vaporously flimsy." The coverlet of tufted blue satin is "covered with the same veil of floating white." The toilet table is "a nestling maze of transparency and lace, with blue beneath, and knots and streamers of mingled satin and velvet round." There is a piano of *bois de rose* "inlaid with plates of painted Sèvres"—to match the clock and candlesticks on the mantelpiece. "At night, light comes from above, where hangs a lamp, of Sèvres again."

This tenderly enthusiastic description somehow conveys the impression that the writer, a serious-minded Englishman, a contributor to the worthy *Blackwood's Magazine*, was very





### Crystal and metal

Chandelier and flower-holders in the Paris Exposition of 1867, exhibited by the Compagnie des Cristalliers de St. Louis

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pleased at his cleverness in finding, among all the dubious interiors of bedizened Second-Empire Paris, something which must have been in every way quite a prize. "Though, in the name of art and elevated feeling and national improvement," he says, "we condemn the furnishing of the Second Empire, the feebler elements of our natures *do* find pleasant features in it." (She was fair!) As a moralist, artist, philosopher and political economist, the contributor to *Blackwood's* believes that there is something ominous about all this "gaud and glitter," but as a being with "human weaknesses" he cannot help acknowledging that "it *does* make life more cheery than it used to be when we were forced to sit bolt upright on hard chairs with knobs on them that ran into our shoulders." He earnestly hopes that the Second Empire will settle down (and become more like England) and that "grave events may make taste graver, though not less winning." He hopes that "art may drive out gewgaws," and that "the more delicate forms of furniture may gradually descend into common use, and carry their civilizing influence everywhere." There is need of reform in furniture, he believes, as there is need of reform in the conditions that produced it. "Some day," he says, "future students of the history of civilization may recognize the real importance of the part furniture has played in the progress of the nineteenth century."

## PARIS UNIVERSEL—1867

THE World's Fair is a necessity of our times, Prince Napoleon said four years after its possibilities had been demonstrated at the Crystal Palace. The democratic ideal, however, that had guided Albert in 1851, and which had been imitated by the French in their universal exhibition of 1855, was somewhat lost sight of in 1867. Although Napoleon had turned his "modern face" more and more to the left to read the gospel of change written by the apostles of Social Democracy (the first book of Marx's "Das Kapital" appeared in 1867) the propaganda designed to attract "the common man," so boldly set forth in 1855, was overpowered in the next universal exhibition by the emphasis on Imperial glory.

American commissioners, sent to Paris to report on the exhibition, wrote that "it is gratifying to know that these great exhibitions are planned and executed in the interests of the mass of the people." This World's Fair, they reported, was similar to the Great Exhibition of London "where those industries, producers and organizations designed to promote the material and moral well-being of the people were most prominently brought forward." These great industrial spectacles, the American commissioners wrote, "have as their most salutary results the appreciation of the true dignity of labor [the more obstreperous the workingman became, the more diligent nine-

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teenth-century writers were in finding nice names for him] and its paramount claims to consideration as the basis of national wealth and power."

But, the earnestly democratic commissioners from the United States notwithstanding, the Exposition of 1867 was unquestionably a crowned head affair, and while Paris stirred with an air of holiday and fête the three heroes of the last World's Fair in Paris, the artisan, the craftsman and the *petit industriel*, now had to content themselves with minor rôles. (A loss of prestige the more keenly felt by the workingman since it had been only five years back that Government had recognized his importance by sending him in bodies to England to confer with British and other workers—a meeting of great significance in the modern world since it had resulted in the birth of the International Workers Association.)

The cult of Saint-Simonism, which had become increasingly important since the first years of the Empire, was undoubtedly responsible for the theme of glory that dominated the 1867 Exposition. The cult, which Raymond Isay describes as "a metaphysical industrialism," had brought *La Gloire* to France in wholly modern terms—in the fruits of conquests compatible with peace. Impelled by Saint-Simonism, the Government had rebuilt cities, expanded the railways, constructed new roads and built steamships to compete with those of England and America. The triumph of the Saint-Simonists had been, of course, the building of the Suez Canal which was to increase French trade in the Orient. Less triumphant had been the plan of French glory in the New World, that had sent the trusting Maximilian and the romantic-minded Carlotta to Mexico to

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found an Empire in a bed of nettles that had the distinctive stinging qualities of three hardy varieties—the Spanish, the British, and the American.

But the tragic awakening from that dream of France in the New World had not yet come when the crowned heads first began to pour into Paris to pay tribute to France as a successful modern nation. It was summer, and it was Paris—Haussmann's Paris, restored, rejuvenated and beautiful. It was largely the city we know today; but for those members of European royalty who had not seen it since Louis-Philippe's time it must have been almost unrecognizable. Haussmann had gashed right and left into Eugène Sue's Mysterious Paris; all its medieval débris had been cleared away, and its picaresque inhabitants sent flying to the hills to breathe a cleaner if less comfortably familiar air. It was now the modern Paris of long, striking vistas, of row upon row of white, cube-like buildings (where several families lived, each on a floor) all of the same height, and all built more or less in the same effective, but routine neo-Renaissance style; of showy official monuments and public structures with their air of belonging to a permanent World's Fair—the ideal tourist city, equipped to receive as well as to dazzle thousands of strangers. "*Haussmann voit grand*," says Henri Clouzot.

Never since the days of Napoleon I had Paris seen such a gathering of crowned heads. The sun shone as it seems to shine in Paris alone, with an urban, a civilized brightness, like one of the creations of the master jewellers, Fouquet or Lémonnier, glittering upon stars and crosses and gold-embroidered uni-

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forms, on the diamond-studded aigrette of the Padishah of Roum, and on the polished steel and gold braid of the officers, as sixty thousand French troops filed in review past Napoleon III. The Emperor, on horseback, shared his moment of glory with the Czar of Russia, while Eugénie with the Crown Prince of Prussia (afterwards Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany) and other royalty, watched his triumph from the grandstands.

The streets were decorated with arches, festoons of flowers, banners and inscriptions, while at night there were rows of yellow and green lights hung along the *grillages* of the buildings, and the architectonic decorations of thousands of gas burners. And, while the guns roared in royal salute to European crowned heads, the sky was illumined by fireworks, rockets and bouquets and *girandoles* of colored fire contrived by a master pyrotechnician. And every evening as the sun set, the band played in the Tuileries Gardens—*Partant pour la Syrie!*

The Sultan of Turkey was among those who came to Louis-Napoleon's Exposition; and Count Bismarck was there, a Wagnerian hero in a white cuirassier's uniform, a spotless knight who moved about the new and beautiful Paris with a holiday air, laughing until the tears came into his eyes at Offenbach's *Grand Duchess of Gerolstein*, and paying pretty compliments to the star, the plumply attractive Hortense Schneider, and telling every one that the Empress was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. (The Prussian chancellor was perhaps almost too well-behaved and appreciative—like the week-end guest who is planning to go off with his host's wife!) And there was another stranger among the crowds, a man with a new kind of face, with shrewd eyes under heavy brows, and a look

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of an adolescent—one who feels superior to the adults about him. A man with a new kind of walk in Paris, who strode about the streets—the streets that were so very straight and so neatly macadamized—with the air of a man who owns the world, but who has not the slightest idea what to do with it now that he has got it. An “innocent abroad” who wrote that Napoleon III’s France, which he was so greatly enjoying, was “a tolerably free land—for people who will not attempt to go too far in meddling with government affairs.” This “innocent” said of the Emperor that he was “old and wrinkled, with eyes half-closed, and *such* a deep, crafty, scheming expression about them!” But, he adds, he admires “his nerve, his calm self-reliance, his shrewd good sense.”

(Was it the young Mark Twain, one wonders, who introduced the American Bar at the Exposition on the Champ de Mars where they served, from “syphon tubes of silver decorated with American eagles,” cream soda, sarsaparilla punch, smashes, and cocktails, and the Victorian dynamite known as a “moustache twister”?)

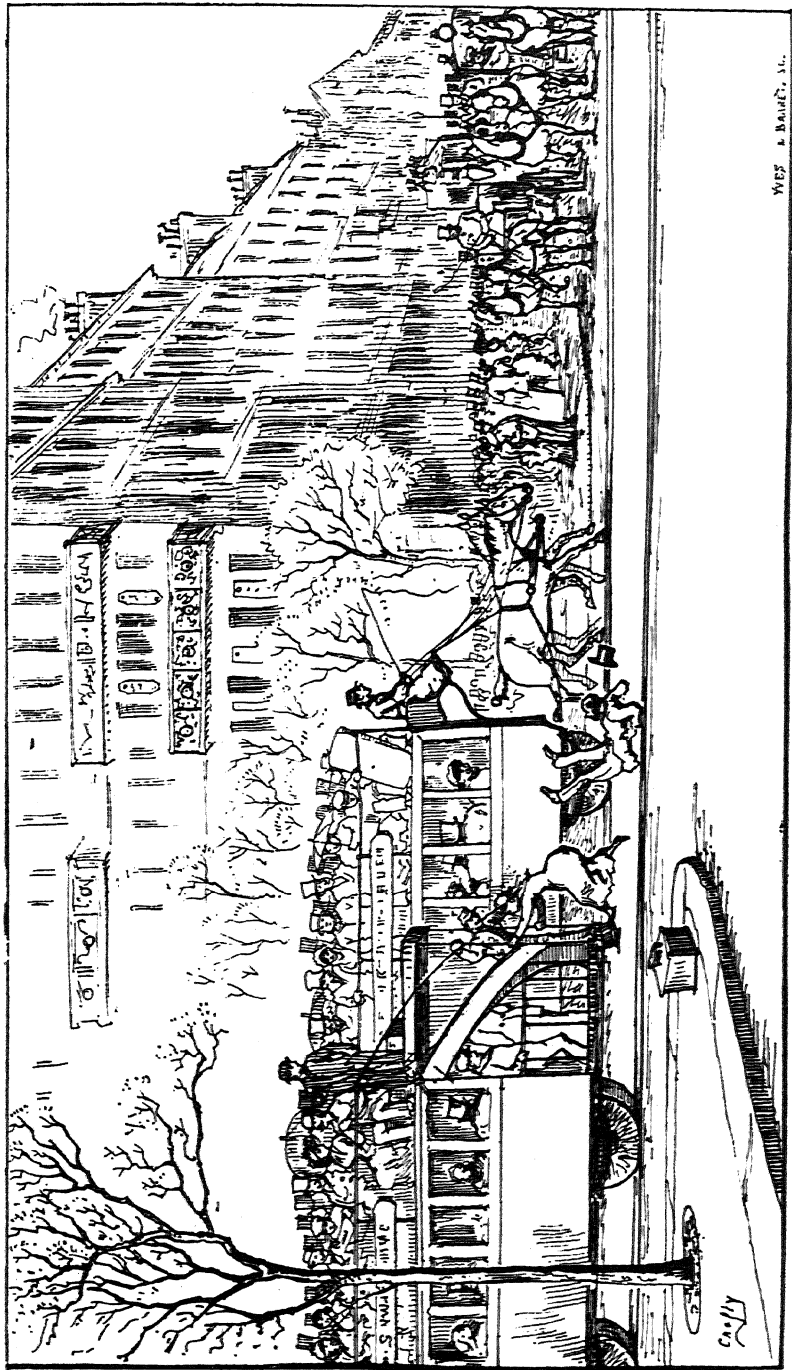
Unreality and dream and glory! The Exposition, housed in its enormous structure of iron and glass on the Champ de Mars, was, according to Louis-Napoleon’s favorite phrase, a “dream from the Arabian Nights.” There were Moroccan tents, Turkish kiosks and Turkish baths, Arabian cafés, Moorish mosques, a reproduction of a palace in Tunis, Oriental caravan-series and bazaars, and a Pavilion of the Isthmus of Suez. England had introduced a note of prosaic reality into this dream-like setting with her Test House (called by the French, “*Le Cottage Anglais*”) where modern science in its relation to the

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home was demonstrated; and Krupp had struck another note of realism with his latest gun that weighed 50,000 kilos, a monster that attracted little enough attention from a crowd lulled by visions of *les paradis artificiels* to be glimpsed in the Eastern exhibits, or in the sweet, varnished fleshiness of Baudry's *Wave and the Pearl* or Gérôme's *Phryne*. Bismarck, in his striking uniform, may have walked by and cast an affectionate, confident glance in its direction. "Its enormous steel cannon balls," said Victor Hugo, "are as effectual against Progress as the bubbles from a child's clay pipe." (Not all the "innocents" were from abroad!)

This triumph of Napoleon III lacked only one bright star, the brightest of all: Victoria did not come to Paris to complete the circle of royalty that swelled Louis-Napoleon's pride. She was now "terribly alone." (Albert, who had worked so gallantly for better housing of the working people in London had become a victim of the very conditions he had hoped to change; he had died from typhoid fever five years before the opening of the Exposition.) But Victoria's image was there, in the equestrian statue by Foley, and her portrait, with Albert's, was to be seen in the jewel cabinet made by the British firm of Elkington, a piece in the neo-Renaissance style, so popular during the epoch, with chiseled gilt-bronze ornamentation, and the royal portraits, after Grumer, painted on enamel. This creation, although it was admired by the French critics, was found by them to represent the coldness of "Englishism." More to their taste was the French coffer of red marble, decorated with gilt-bronze, which had a medallion containing the portraits of the Empress and the Prince Imperial. If it displayed no "Eng-





WES & BAIRD, N.Y.

Paris tramways in the eighties

From a drawing by Craffy

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lishism," it was, with its profuse decoration of combined neo-Greek and neo-Renaissance motifs a characteristic example of "Victorianism," a creation that needed only to be reproduced in wood and stripped of its excessively ornate official features to become a typical "parlor piece" for the Victorian home.

*M. Prudhomme*, who had found so much in 1855 to start his imagination on the road of modest aspiration, now found himself surrounded by such a brilliant array of *meubles de luxe* that nothing short of a *coup d'état* in his orderly existence would bring him into any sort of intimate relationship with the greater part of the exhibits. There were a few modest pieces of furniture covered with a practical material called "American leather cloth," and there was hideous "peasant" furniture of oak (soon to be imitated by the nineteenth-century factories), a cheap new floor covering made of cocoanut matting, and reasonably-priced seamless carpets; and, it was not too impossible for him to believe, the day might come when he could order one of the less ornate pianos exhibited by Chickering or Bechstein. He could enjoy, without a desire for purchase, the various kickshaws from all over the world, and Fremiet's clever statuettes of painted wax and papier-mâché that displayed in exact detail all the uniforms of the Emperor's army. And he could take an interest that was more than impersonal in the new machine called the locomobile. (What, he might wonder, would the Paris streets be like when these horseless-carriages were added to the horse-pulled trams and buses, the towering camions that charged into the traffic drawn by two or three powerful Percherons with murder in their eyes, the provision wagons that dizzily wound their way in and out among the

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heavier vehicles, the phaetons and carts of the gentlemen drivers, and the bizarre contraption that advertised the firm calling itself "Old England," a sort of hippic sandwich-man affair which daily caused two or three runaways and other street accidents.)

But, in the Exposition of 1867, there was little to inspire *M. Prudhomme* with ideas of improvement as far as his home surroundings were concerned. Eventually, reflections of these *meubles de luxe*, now beyond his means, would reach him by way of the factories; echoes of the classic grandeur of Fourdinois' sculptural cabinet of ebony with its carved caryatids, statuettes, masks and medallions; or imitations in cheap materials of the Grand-Hotel magnificence of Diehl's neo-Greek wardrobe with its large terra cotta bas-relief of "Aurora," and its gilt-bronze ornaments in the Greek style combined with naturalistic peacock motifs. The impressive classicism of the repoussé silver tea service and guéridon, designed by the architect Rossigneux for the Maison Christofle, would also bear winter fruit in the products of the enterprising factories of the future. Among the British productions prolific in ideas that would inevitably influence factory design were the Messrs. Holland's sideboard of carved oak in the new-Gothic style, "picked out" in colors and ornamented with brass, and green cloth curtains; and the maple wardrobe by Dyer & Watts, a master-creation of this firm which made a speciality of "imitating all kinds of woods by painting merely." In this piece, which was bought by the Empress, the ornamental inlaying "was so successfully carried out as to be quite as refreshing to the eye as if the woods imitated had been of the rarest and most costly."

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In less elaborate form, reproductions of this piece would become one of the most popular furniture types in Europe and America during the next four decades.

Another type—there are many examples of it in the Exposition—which was destined to be widely imitated, was the attenuated guéridon, or stand, in tripod form with vaguely classical ornaments and claw feet; this was often made with chains that hung down from the top to the upper part of the base—a form of decoration whose suggestion of Roman magnificence struck a chord in the hearts of nineteenth-century designers. The guéridon was made in wood and in metal, and often in oxydized silver—a favorite material during the late seventies and the eighties. Of oxydized silver, as well as of iron, silvered and gilt, were the somewhat startling fire-dogs exhibited by M. Clavier which were in the forms of realistic owls, cupids, fruit and flowers.

One of the most striking wallpapers exhibited was that in which the eighteenth-century *trompe l'œil* was attempted (a Baroque conceit not often adopted by the Second Empire designer). The room hung with this “eye-deceiver” would give the appearance of a walled garden with columns and, in niches, marble vases filled with flowering plants, while at intervals there were simulated curtained-windows which framed a view of rolling landscape and blue sky—a decoration that would give a dizzy sensation of being in two places at the same time.

The 1867 Exposition had its rebel artist as had the one of 1855, a *réfuté* of the Salon who gathered fifty canvases together and exhibited them in a place apart as Courbet had done twelve years before. When Manet's *Olympia* had been refused by

the Academy, Zola's cry of "Murder!" had started *l'affaire Manet*, publicity that now sent a few idle Exposition visitors into Manet's one-man show. They failed to find what Zola had



On the Rue de la Paix in the late seventies

described as his "sweet brutality," but instead looked with wonder and dismay upon *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and the already famous *Olympia*. Coming from the pleasantly satisfying entertainment to be had in the works of Rosa Bonheur, Cabanel and Meissonier, enshrined in the Exhibition, they felt that the work of this artist, with his harsh black outlines and

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his manner of portraying human beings in a way that made them not only less than ideal, but subservient to a pattern that was in itself freakish and repulsive, was an affront against art and nature. Like the insane poet who had written the banned "Les Fleurs du Mal," Manet, the good bourgeoisie thought, deserved the sharpest of rebukes.

On the day that Napoleon III distributed the prizes at the Exposition his face was set in its usual mask-like inscrutability; but on this occasion it was the mask of the poker player who has read the occult signs that mean ruin. The despatches that had arrived that day had not brought news of the end of the Empire—they had merely told of the end of a political empire set up thousands of miles away in the New World, and the death by a Mexican bullet of its pathetic Emperor—but in this failure (not altogether unexpected), Louis-Napoleon could see the real significance in other failures, forces that would now combine to crush out the glory of his dictatorship. While he awarded the gold medal to Fourdinois for his impressive jewel cabinet, a silver medal to Dyer & Watts for their wardrobe of false inlay, and a gold medal to the *Compagnie des Cristalleries de St. Louis* for their glass chandeliers and flower holders, did he hear the hysterical cries of Carlotta when the whole world had suddenly become "*Poison!*" to her; or did his ears buzz with the roar of that cannon of 50,000 kilos, so quiet now among the silks and terries and cashmeres and demure Dresden figures at the Exposition, like a prize bull at a Spanish fiesta? Or did he imagine he heard again Bismarck's hearty laughter at Hortense Schneider's buxom comedy at the Variétés?

In three years it was all over. There was no more Empire, and no more Bonapartism. It almost came to the point where there was no more Paris. With the defeat of the army that had gone off shouting "*à Berlin!*" and singing *Partant pour la Syrie*.



Concert of the Orangerie in the Tuileries Gardens

These citizens of Paris feel no regrets for the lost Tuileries Palace and the Second Empire. The chairs in the foreground give an intimation of the metal furniture of the future

the surrender of Napoleon III, and the presence of Prussian soldiers at the very gates of Paris, the old furies had been let loose, and Paris itself was in danger of being destroyed. "What is the meaning of all these revolutions of the last sixty years?" Lamartine asked during the July Monarchy. "It is the pursuit of the same idea, and these changes are only the different phases

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of a single revolution. France wants a rational government . . . a government that will spread its benefits over the entire society." Lamartine was now old and dying, and there was no one to tell the infuriated people of the Commune that destruction of Paris was the destruction of their own property. They tore down Napoleon I from his column in the Place Vendôme, and set fire to Saint-Cloud and the Hôtel de Ville—where Victoria had been fêted in 1855. They set fire to the Palais Royal, and in the wing that had been the home of Prince Napoleon his carved rosewood sofas and tables and all his furnishings in the respectable style of the *confortable à l'anglais*, disappeared in the flames. Barges on the Seine loaded with gasoline for the destruction of Second Empire souvenirs caught fire and spread terror along the quays. One of them ignited the roof of the ammunition factory that had hired hundreds of women workers since the beginning of the Commune, and all of these lost their lives in the explosion.

But the greatest spectacle of all, a fireworks display that surpassed anything in the days of Louis-Napoleon's triumph, was the destruction of the Tuileries. Gunpowder and gasoline were brought in bus-loads to the palace; everything was soaked with gasoline, the Gobelins and Beauvais tapestries, the silk and velvet hangings; the walls in the private rooms of the Empress—the blue salon, painted with portraits of Eugénie's ladies-in-waiting; the green salon with its mural decorations of brightly colored tropical birds; and the rose salon painted by Chaplin in the style of Boucher, a coquettish room in rose and gold, its deeply coved ceiling decorated with an allegory, *The Arts Paying Tribute to the Empress*, in which a smiling muse



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held forth the infant Prince Imperial against a background of vine-wreathed trellises and garlands of flowers. A work inspired by the artists of the time of Louis XVI, but, like the furniture in that style that decorated the room, of unmistakable nineteenth-century origin. (It was in this room that the Empress had said good-bye to her household after the news of the surrender at Sedan had come, and when the mobs in the garden outside were coming nearer and nearer, crying "*Vive la République!*")

The hangings of the Throne Room were also soaked with gasoline. (It had been used mainly as a passageway by the Emperor and Eugénie who had had no other way of getting to the room where they breakfasted!) The incendiaries drenched the halls and staircases with oil—the staircases that had once been lined with the handsome Cent Gardes (beautiful statues that had come strangely to life after Sedan when they joined their fate with that of the people); and gasoline and gunpowder were carried to the floor where the sinister Spanish woman, Pepa, had been empress in a world of wardrobes filled with Eugénie's wonderful dresses. (The Empress had given to Pepa her orders for the day through a speaking tube, and in a short while an effigy-Empress, complete with dress, bonnet, gloves, fan or parasol, would come creaking down in a kind of elevator to Eugénie's dressing room. The precious crinolines were too fragile, and also too enormous, to be carried down the narrow, dark, smelling stairs of the antiquated old palace.) When the Tuileries had been thoroughly soaked with oil the fuses were lit and crinolines, marbles, silks, brocades, Sèvres vases, bronzes, books, Winterhalters, fans, the little Scotch costumes of the Prince Imperial, and Eugénie's mauve parasol with the ostrich trimmings,

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all disappeared in the explosion. The Tuileries stood for a time, a beautiful, rose-colored ruin, a shell that looked strangely unreal between the Marsan Pavilion and the Louvre; then, in 1872, it was demolished and a garden made where it had stood.

The new Republic, in 1872, busily put all back into order again. Paving-stone barricades still blocked certain streets, and along the Seine there was still a smell of burned oil, wine and brandy where the provision warehouses had been on fire, but Napoleon was back again on his column, the traffic was still congested at five o'clock in the afternoon on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, and there was still a procession of banker's carriages along the Avenue de l'Impératrice (now the Avenue de Bois de Boulogne), and the Maison Dorée and the Café Anglais were as crowded as ever. Citizens of the Republic could go to the Opera to hear the same music that had been heard during the Empire, Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, Gounod's *Faust*, Bizet's *Carmen* (but Mérimée was not there to hear it), Ambroise Thomas's *Mignon* (that glorified the Second Empire *cocotte*) and Verdi's *Aida* (a souvenir of Eugénie's triumphant reception at Constantinople during the ceremonies at the opening of the Suez Canal). There was no more Wagner for a long time, and other "music of the future" had to wait for the future. But if no "new music" was heard in the Republic, the citizens that had so recently sung themselves hoarse in the *Marseillaise* could now do what the most luxurious among the upper bourgeoisie of the Second Empire could not do—they could hear the old operas in the stupendously ornate new building designed by Charles Garnier where, perhaps, there was some satisfaction to be had from knowing that they were surrounded



“Liberty” in Paris

The head of Bartholdi's statue on exhibition at the Paris World's Fair of 1878. For a few sous Fair visitors could go up inside the head for a view of Paris

by more gold leaf than had adorned any single interior during the gilded Second Empire.

When the sky above the Rue de Rivoli had been like a Turner sunset with the black clouds of smoke and the red flames, and the prototypes of his characters in “l'Assommoir” were drinking to the death of the Empire in absinthe, Zola wrote Cézanne in

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Provence—"Our day has come!" But he exulted too soon.

When the Republic opened its own Universal Exhibition, seven years later, the walls of the Beaux Arts were hung with the same official "machines" that had delighted the subjects of the Emperor, and no Manets, Courbets or Cézannes were to be found among them. And the great structure on the Champ de Mars, and the new Trocadéro, housed the same skillfully executed banalities that had been the pride of exhibitors in 1867; Fourdinois again contributed masterful works of cabinet making, saved from being mere "macaroni" by fine workmanship and beautiful materials; and the Maison Christofle was again displaying its artistry in contriving ponderous pieces from gold, silver, electroplate, marble and glass; they introduced, however, a new note by works in "that Japanese style of ornament which has exercised so marked an influence in all branches of decorative art during the last ten years." The "Aurora" of 1867 made a reappearance in 1878 in a wardrobe created this time by an English designer who transformed "Aurora" into "Juno." Her head, "sedate and queenly-looking" decorated the center panel while above her, in a shield, was "the traditional peacock." Heads of Venus and Minerva decorated side panels, and there were also other ornaments—The Earth and The Ocean, peacock feathers, Aphrodite's golden apple, roses and myrtle. All the decorations were inlaid with box and other woods, as well as ivory and mother-of-pearl.

Majolica from the Minton factory of Stoke-on-Trent was exhibited as in 1867, and in 1855, when Victoria had been gratified to know that it was envied by the French ceramists. And Manchester had sent a buffet, of old brown English oak from



*Courtesy, Durand-Ruel, New York*

**"La Danse à la campagne," Auguste Renoir (1888)**

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Sherwood forest, with moldings and bands of ebony and walnut, described as "embodying firmness and solidity without heaviness" and as a piece that while it "retained a decided reminiscence of the old English style was boldly and avowedly intended to be Victorian."

Of British make, too, was a creation that shared the honors with Gustave Doré's colossal Bacchanalian vase (a forerunner of certain works of Rodin) in being one of the most sensational exhibits in the Champ de Mars. This was a production from the Birmingham glass factory of Osler which had made the famous crystal fountain for the Crystal Palace. The 1878 piece was a Gothic sideboard of *glass!* There were gold moldings in the arches, and the top and base were of ebony, but the rest was entirely of glass, pilasters, wedges, coins, crockets and finials of pure crystal.

But perhaps the chief novelty of the Republican exhibition, and the most popular, was the head of *Liberty*, belonging to Bartholdi's statue which was to be sent as a gift from France to New York. For a few *sous* the citizens could climb up into the head and look out over the Champ de Mars at a Paris they were told was now their own.

PART THREE

# U. S. A.



*From Godey's Lady's Book*

American fashions, 1839



*From an engraving after the painting by John George Brown*

### **"The Music Lesson"**

Aspidistra, cast metal stand, Axminster carpet, carved settle, typical arrangement of pictures in the seventies



## BROTHER JONATHAN AT HOME

VICTORIANISM had its most successful blossoming in America. We had fought valiantly against the Devil, the Indians and the Wilderness; now, under the influence of the Victorian creed, we set out to fight against life itself. We had no traditions of Merrie England to help us make the transition from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth. The hard, tight discipline imposed by the wintry god of the Puritans (which nevertheless, had been worshipped with the purity of genuine passion) had left us open to the Victorian cult of the Genteel. With the illusion that our waggons were hitched to stars we trailed along complacently behind Mrs. Grundy's buggy.

When Victoria succeeded to the throne of England, we had just begun to spread ourselves out over the land which for a little over two centuries we had been calling home: A vast, unfathomable land whose ancient memories did not include any trace of us at all, but instead held the immemorial souvenir of a people who had lived on it with humble grace, scarcely disturbing its surface. (At the door on summer evenings, sat the little Hiawatha, we sang safely in Cambridge in good Greek numbers).

It was good old Mrs. Grundy, the formidable shelf-bosomed dame, who helped us to overcome our agoraphobia and our uneasy triumph of interlopers. We enthroned her as a household

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god—a complex, female divinity who was a sort of pots-and-pans Pallas Athene, and Demeter, the Earth Mother, in spectacles, with the attributes of the school teacher and the eternal chaperone—with Liberty on her right hand, and materialism on her left. The American woman, as a priestess of Mrs. Grundy, became a demi-divinity herself. When mature, she was the Good Woman; and when young, the Genteel Female—frail, helpless and incontestably, impossibly pure. A kind of twisted Orientalism kept her confined in a purda of her own making; a goddess in the land of the free, she cultivated the arts of liberty at her own fireside until she had evolved the most domestically powerful type on earth—the sheltered American woman.

(In the forties there appeared in New York State a materialization of Mrs. Grundy who was violently active in the reverse direction: Amelia Jenks Bloomer, editor of *The Lily*, “a magazine devoted to Temperance and literature,” believed that the first step in the emancipation of the Victorian woman was to free her from her feminine dress. Mrs. Bloomer not only invented what she considered to be the ideal costume for the emancipated woman, but wore it herself and lectured on its benefits. The Bloomer costume consisted of a three-quarter length, loose tunic of silk with bright buttons down the front, a wide hat somewhat the shape of a Southern planter’s hat, and long, loose trousers gathered in at the ankle. They were Turkish trousers!—but if she realized that she was advocating the harem costume for the “new” woman, it made no difference to the determined reformer. Mrs. Bloomer and her converts paraded the streets of American and European cities in their fantastic get-up with-

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out interference from the police—proof that the Victorians, although prudish, were incurably experimental. People jeered and threw things at the rebels but, since they were fully, if outrageously, dressed, left them otherwise in peace.

Brother Jonathan, who prided himself on being a simple man, made no attempt to understand his feminine counterpart; the more of an artificial creation she became, the better he liked her.

The very young and agreeable Mr. Bartlett who, in 1851, wrote his impressions of the Crystal Palace in a travel book for American publication, could not resist making a comparison between the women of the English peerage and those of the aristocracy of America. ("For it is useless denying that we have an aristocracy," he says—although he admits it is still "puny, young and not oppressive.") "In England the highest ladies exercise much in the open air," he writes; and he goes on to say that "an English woman of refinement thinks nothing of walking half a dozen miles, nothing of riding on horseback twenty." While, in America, he points out ("although comparisons are odious") outdoor exercise is an exception for women in "fashionable circles" in which "it is not the desire of women to be in robust health. If a young lady be languishing, with a snowy cheek just tinged with crimson, if she have a tremulous voice, she may expect to break a score of hearts! For such a creature to think of walking a mile would be sheer madness. If she goes out, it is in her softly-cushioned carriage, with servants to wrap her carefully away from the benignant influences out of doors, and the vulgar wind and sunshine have not a stray peep at that exquisite skin of hers."

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Nathaniel Hawthorne, our Puritan Nathaniel—whose wife saw him in space, never “in time”—feels, after four years as American consul in London, a nostalgic tenderness for the American Genteel Female. How different are the buxom, rosy-cheeked English girls from “the trim little daughters of my native land”! But even the author of the Mrs. Grundy-inspired work, “*The Scarlet Letter*,” feels that there is something wrong in nineteenth-century America. “We, in our dry atmosphere,” he writes in the fifties, “are getting too nervous, haggard and dyspeptic, extenuated [“trim” in the case of the “little daughters”!], unsubstantial, theoretic, and need to be made grosser.”

A short story written by an American in the forties contains a characteristic description of the ideal heroine of the Romantic Age. “There was a glow under her skin,” it begins, “—an effect of paleness fair as the lotus leaf, but warmer and brighter, and which came through the alabaster fineness of the grain, like something the eye cannot define, but which we know, by some spirit-perception, to be the effluence of purer existence—the breathing through, as it were, of the luminous tenantry of an angel.” (The luscious spirit of all this is amply reflected in the applied ornament of the time: both have the same abundance of life which is, at the same time, an escape from life.)

The description continues: “To this glowing paleness, with golden hair, I had never seen united any but a disposition of predominant melancholy. . . . Her lips which were cut with the fine tracery of the pencilling of a tulip cup, were of a slender and delicate fullness, expressive of a mind which took (of the sense) only so much life as would hold down the spirit during its probation.”

A French writer, as late as the nineties, also notes, if with less rhetoric, the languishing type of beauty of the American girl. "I found the Chicago women and those of the West generally, pretty, with more color than their eastern sisters, only, as a rule,



American Gothic—the sixties

quite slight, not to say thin. That which is lacking in the pretty American face of the East is color and freshness," he writes. "If American women went in more for outdoor exercise; if they let the outer air penetrate constantly into their rooms; if they gave up living in hothouses they would have some color."

Life, the upper-class American woman of Victorian times had decided, was vulgar and she would have no part of it; she would be a spirit, an idea, a dream with neither legs, back, nor lungs to breathe—and Brother Jonathan humored her in her delusions. She was a creature apart; and when she stepped

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down to mingle in his world he made concessions and sacrifices in order to defend her sacrosanct position. Since the smell of his "segars" was hateful to her, he went to great lengths to shield her from his tobacco smoke. Most American public buildings in the nineteenth century had what was known as a "Ladies Entrance," and on "the cars" she could enter a smoking car with the serene knowledge that every "segar" and pipe would be put out in honor of her presence. The rule in the South was: "When a lady enters a smoking car it is no longer a smoking car."

Having everything her own way, the American woman of the upper middle-class was in a position to rule her own home in all matters that concerned its decoration. Her taste and judgment went unquestioned. Whatever was yearning, aspiring or suppressed in her character she expressed in her surroundings which reflected, as time went on, the violence of her fanatical domesticity, the revenge which she took against the material aspects of her holy empire when its more subtle aspects began to baffle her. The deference almost universally given her (it was not always chivalry); her right to go her own way within her own sphere, and the overactive exercise of her will without the corresponding activity of intellect and imagination, sometimes went to her head. When this happened, her Mrs. Grundyism overbalanced her, and she became an unleashed fury. Great Americans had an unfortunate way of attaching themselves to this monster of Respectability—or did they, being so full of life provoke her, in her ideal of anti-life, beyond endurance? Lincoln married one of these women afflicted with excessive Victorianism: Mark Twain and Herman Melville also had

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“model” Victorian wives. It might have been the consciousness of Mrs. Grundy back in New Bedford that caused Melville’s strange experience at the helm of Captain Ahab’s *Pequod* in search of The Great White Whale, when he felt the ship progressing in reverse. (It was he, himself, he found, who was facing backwards—in the direction of home and the hated, but necessary respectability!) “Uppermost was the impression, that whatever swift, rushing thing I stood on was not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern.”

Thoreau, wiser—or more selfish—refused to be enslaved by the creed of the Victorian woman. But in his escape he solaced himself with another Victorian divinity—Mother Nature. [Her comforting womanly breast was the only one at the time it was considered proper to mention.] Under the sky, companioned by the trees, he sneers at the domestic demi-goddess’s temple and fortress—choked with tortuous furniture and crammed with flimsy bric-a-brac. “When I consider how our houses are built and paid for, or not paid for,” he writes, “and their internal embellishments manufactured and sustained. I wonder that the floor does not give way under the visitor while he is admiring the gewgaws on the mantelpiece.”

And the first question, he says, that he always wants to ask when he is confronted by the man who has not only submitted to his padded, gilded, be-carved, fancy-worked cage, but glows with pride in it, is—“*Who bolsters you?*” Out-of-doors, Thoreau states in triumph, a “taste for the beautiful” is not cultivated, there being “no home, and *no housekeeper*”! In 1845, in New England, there were few to heed his warning that—“Before we can adorn our houses with beautiful objects, the walls must be

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stripped, and our lives must be stripped, and beautiful houses and beautiful living be laid for a foundation."

Edgar Allan Poe, a true Victorian in all but the occasional timeless rhythms of his genius, worshipped the Genteel Female in her most dematerialized form. His *Ligeia* is Mrs. Grundy's favorite daughter, a creature of exquisite sensibilities refined to the point of annihilation, too beautiful in every way for the vulgarity of living. (Poe's heroines are anemic Isoldes doomed to faint on flowered Brussels carpets and to drink the love-potion from goblets of pressed glass.)

Poe, like Balzac and Théophile Gautier and other writers of the Romantic Age, was nearly always conscious of the material background of his characters, and usually gave minute descriptions of the setting in which the action of his stories took place. Poe was also affected by the over-rich mixture that produced decorative objects in the Victorian period and, like other writers of the time whose field was far removed from that of the specialist, he had much to say about the decoration and ornament of his day. Yankee decoration, he says bluntly, is "preposterous." The populace, "looking always upward for models, are insensibly led to confound the two entirely separate ideas of magnificence and beauty." With the result, according to Poe, that in America considerations of cost came before those of esthetics. "There could be nothing more offensive to the eye of an artist," he says, "than the interior of what is termed in the United States . . . a well-furnished apartment."

As Balzac reveled with sensuous pleasure in rich hangings bordered with deep fringe and decorated with huge tassels, Poe gets the same kind of pleasure from carpets. The carpet





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ebony-black floors, its looming tapestries, its ponderous Renaissance furniture, and the feeble "encrimsoned" light from its stained-glass windows.

Poe's taste in decoration is clearly revealed in his description of an ideal room. It has, as he sees it, two large deeply recessed windows which open out to an Italian veranda. Like those in "The Fall of the House of Usher," the panes are of "crimson-tinted glass," and are set in rosewood frames "more massive than usual." There are glass-curtains of silver tissue that hang "loosely in small volumes." The window hangings are of "rich crimson silk fringed with a deep net-work of gold"; these fall from beneath a frieze of "rich gilt-work" which serves as a cornice. The curtains are controlled by a thick rope of gold tied loosely about them. The carpet "quite half an inch thick," is of crimson Saxony material with a design in relief of interlaced gold cords, like those at the windows.

The wallpaper is a glossy silver-gray with an arabesque pattern of crimson. There are many paintings in burnished gold frames, richly carved—paintings of the type of "Stanfield's fairy grottoes," or "Chapman's *The Lake of the Dismal Swamp*." There are also ideal heads in the manner of Sully. (Portraits of the Genteel Female "of ethereal beauty"! ) "Two large low sofas of rosewood and crimson silk, gold-flowered, form the only seats with the exception of two light conversation chairs, also of rosewood." Shelves with golden edges hang on the walls from crimson silk cords with golden tassels; these "sustain two or three hundred magnificently bound books." There is an octagonal table entirely of gold-veined marble, and a rosewood pianoforte, neither of which (the truest note of rebellion!) has a *covering of*

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any kind. At each corner of the room is a large "gorgeous" Sèvres vase filled with flowers. There is a tall candelabrum with an antique lamp "filled with highly perfumed oil," and, suspended from the ceiling by a gold chain, there is an Argand lamp, with a crimson-tinted ground-glass shade, which throws a "magical radiance" over the room. (Unquestionably, Mrs. Grundy, with her succession of bold experiments, her morbid concentration on the subject, and her inspiration derived from nothing more exciting than reading Godey's *Lady's Book*, and drinking claret lemonade, was a better decorator than Poe!)

In the year that began Victoria's reign, American cities were mere provincial towns, not cities at all as compared with London and Paris. Boston and Philadelphia, in spite of their busy ports, still moved in the tempo of the eighteenth century. In Washington, the cows pastured peacefully on the beautifully green, marshy meadowland within sight of imposing, official buildings in the grandiose neo-Athenian style imported by European architects. Chicago, which only a few years back had been an Indian trading-post guarded by the blood-stained Fort Dearborn, solitary and isolated under the eternal prairie sky, was now feeling the first thrills of its existence as a town, connected with the magnetic currents of the East by the Erie Canal.

St. Louis, although cut off from the sea by the Mississippi mud-flats, could boast of a handsome brick house or two, and also of a theatre. San Francisco was a nameless dot on the Bay of San Francisco, and not in the United States at all. New York was beginning to stretch itself lengthwise on its narrow rock,

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and was building its modified Georgian and Jeffersonian-Greek houses to replace the low-roofed Dutch farmhouses now in the way of the city plan. (In 1833, Samuel Morse writes to Fenimore Cooper: "New York is *improved*, as the word goes, wonderfully. You will return to a strange city; you will not recognize many of your acquaintances among the old buildings; brand-new buildings, stores and houses are taking the place of the good, staid, modest houses of the early settlers. *Improvement* is all the rage. . . . Everybody is driving after money as usual, and there is an alarm of fire every half-hour, as usual, and the pigs have the freedom of the city as usual . . . ")

When Louis-Napoleon, banished from France for his Strasbourg escapade, came to New York, Washington Square, no longer the Potter's Field but now called the Washington Parade Ground, was almost on the outskirts of the closely built-up section. He was received in stately drawing-rooms decorated in the late Empire style with pieces imported from England and France, and also with the graceful adaptations of the Empire style by New York's own cabinet maker, Duncan Phyfe, with their sharp, clean outlines and their restrained carving. Louis-Napoleon's hostesses were the descendants of Dutch merchants and English representatives of the Crown, who fought as valiantly as Captain John Smith had fought at Jamestown to defend their fortress of exclusiveness in what was, even then, a great clearing-house for people of all kinds and nationalities.

Ideas, exclusive of the political, were imported from abroad. In the thirties, the French dressmakers had kept those in America in touch with the latest styles by shipping to them

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every season dolls completely dressed in costumes that were replicas, in miniature, of those worn by fashionable women in Paris. After Victoria had come to the throne there were despatches to Godey's *Lady's Book* from which American women found out that dresses were being worn with the trimming cut at the edges *en chevaux de frise*, thickly quilled; that the new Cashmere shawls had wide, splendid borders, and deep fringes whose colors repeated those of the borders; that "spencers" were being worn, both by those with young figures, and by dowagers who ought to have known better; and that the wide, halo-like bonnets were creeping further and further back on the head until the bonnet strings were mere useless ornaments, and the bonnets themselves only kept from falling off by the soft cushions at the back of the wearer's necks; and that the newest fashion note read: "Lace, lace, lace, wherever it can be stuck on. The gowns have lace trimmings and falls; and spencers, caps, bonnets and handkerchiefs—all have lace."

If Queen Victoria—gay and young in the first years of her reign, with a boisterous Merrie England laugh that exposed her gums—wore white tulle trimmed with silver and pink roses and *blonde*, with diamonds and feathers and lappets on her head, the women of New York and Boston and Philadelphia soon knew about it, and ordered their ball costumes accordingly. And Victoria's black velvet shawl embroidered in gold thread, with trimmings of golden tassels, was sure to be seen in slightly less costly replicas on Fifth Avenue, Beacon Street and Chestnut Street. When *poult de soie*, *mousseline-de-soie*, *gros de Naples*, bombazeñe, Victoria lawn, *barège*, challis, jaconet, terry cloth and Empress satin were fashionable in

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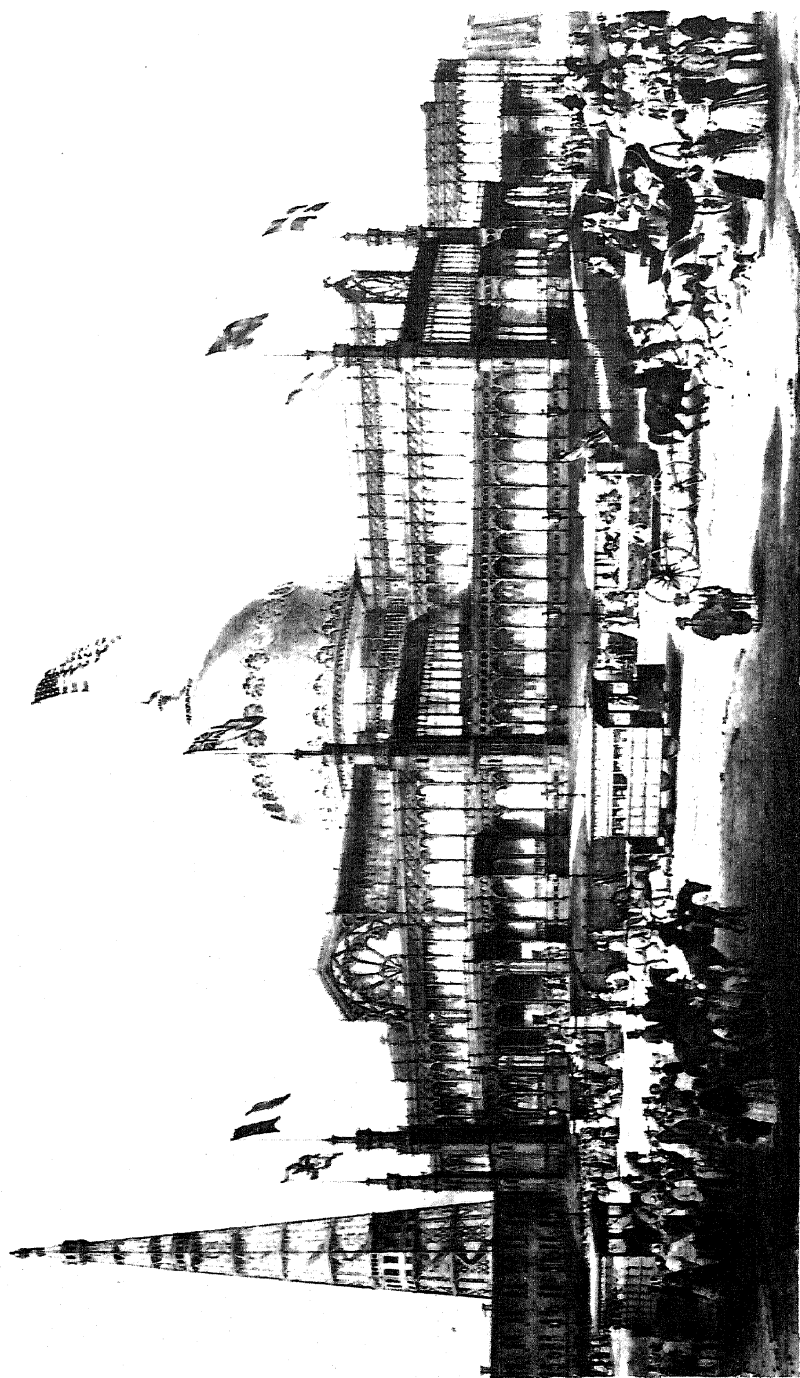
England and on the Continent they were imported for the clothes of American women.

Almost as soon as the salons and drawing-rooms of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and Belgravia were adorned with sculptural cabinets of ebony, or fruit wood stained to look like ebony, inlaid with ivory, or with bone as a substitute, American parlors had their own inlaid cabinets of ebony, or of American walnut—a wood darker than the European walnut and an excellent material for the fashionable black furniture of the period.

But not all the stuffs for dresses, and articles of house furnishing, were of European or British manufacture; American industry and manufacture, which had risen in importance since the first decades of the nineteenth century, and which had helped to create the class wealthy enough to follow the fashions abroad, were feverishly engaged in the game of competition with the countries to which Americans looked for creative ideas.

An impetus was given American manufacture by the World's Fair which was held in New York two years after the opening of the Crystal Palace in London. The New York Fair, although it was an imitation of the London Exhibition—it even borrowed the name “Crystal Palace”—was not, like the other, an epochal event in the world of international design. It was, however, America's own fair, her first of importance, a summing up of her accomplishments in the arts of manufacture, as well as a gathering together of world products which could now be compared with those at home.

On Reservoir Square (now Bryant Park), under the roof



*From a lithograph by N. Currier, N. Y.*

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of iron and glass, boasted of as "the largest glass dome in the world," where the organs played as loudly as they had in London in 1851, and where there was a crystal fountain that was as much of a "trysting place" as the one in the Hyde Park structure had been, the crinolines and the "wide-awake" hats crowded the various courts and, as in London, there was a sense of wonder and awe at being alive in a modern world that held so many marvels of ingenuity and beauty.

Americans had never seen so many statues; there was the colossal affair by Herr Kiss of Berlin, the *Amazon* in galvanized zinc, which had been so admired by Victoria when it had been one of the chief attractions of the 1851 London Exhibition: there was also another favorite from the London Crystal Palace, Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*, and there were Thorwaldsen's *Niobe* and *Hope*, and the equestrian statue of George Washington by the Italian, Marochetti, who was Queen Victoria's favorite sculptor. There were marble busts by Kinney, of Worcester, Massachusetts, and a bronze dog by Hoppin of Providence, Rhode Island, which excited considerable comment as it was rare at this time for Americans to cast their work in bronze. (It was not until the eighties that Oscar Wilde could have the opportunity to say, "Washington has too many bronze generals.")

Birmingham, which was the source of new ideas in the house-furnishing arts, as Paris was the creator of ideas in the world of feminine fashion, exhibited its fantastic pearl-inlaid, gold and colored transfer-patterned papier-mâché articles which immediately attracted American designers and started them on a dizzy Coney-Island sort of junket of their own.



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"The Day Dreamer" chair made its appearance again and, as in London, was greatly admired for the "elegant beauty" of its sinuous curves, and the fertile imagination of its symbolical decoration. A papier-mâché "Siamese chair" was also considered novel and attractive—a new type of conversation chair. A zebrawood cabinet, also in the English section, had painted panels—*under glass*—illustrating "The History of Woman."

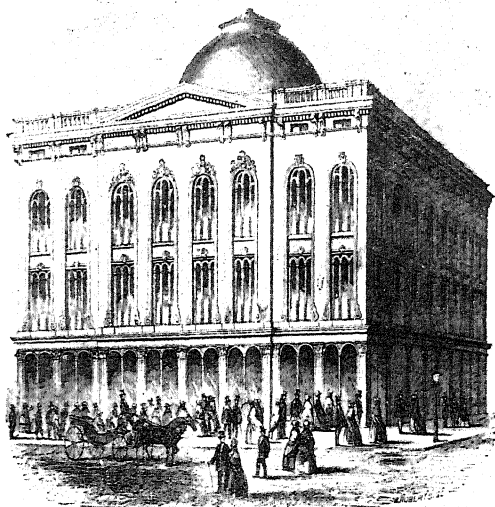
Gobelins and Beauvais tapestries were not seen often in the neighborhood of Reservoir Square, although the fortunes that were being made in California would soon be spilling out to France for these products of the royal factories to cover the walls of "old" French châteaux that would be rising before long in San Francisco, St. Louis and New York. If the wonderful creations of the French looms had little meaning for the average American in the Crystal Palace, there was Louis-Napoleon, looking fresh-skinned and fascinating, embroidered on satin; Christoffe's elaborate electroplate ware; Erard's pianofortes, and De Bain's mechanical piano—one like it would soon be grinding out tunes with painful gaiety at Saint-Cloud; mechanical birds, and the Copeland factory's new Parian ware in marvelously realistic statuettes of *Paul and Virginia* and *The Prodigal Son*. Furniture-makers of this country gathered round the large central *pouf* from France with its chandelier rising from a vase—an impressive article, and not too "Frenchified"; imitations of it would soon appear in New York and other cities. French ingenuity had also a surprise for the New York World's Fair visitors in the new imitation pearls which were to play such an important part

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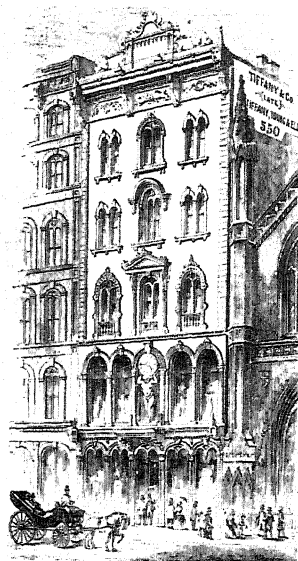
in the progress of democracy in the United States, rivaling imitation diamonds in the adornment of the American woman of all conditions.

The American exhibits, it was considered by the critics, held their own with those of England and Europe. Even the papier-mâché furniture by the American firm of Ward was thought to be quite as good as that of Birmingham, and the ambitious carved rosewood *étagère* exhibited by a Brooklyn cabinet maker, with its over-exuberant Renaissance motifs and its complicated series of restless profiles, was, if anything, more admired than the works by French furniture-makers. Another piece in which Americans took pride was the walnut *étagère* designed by G. Herter, who, although a foreign cabinet maker, lived in New York, allowing Americans "to claim the talent naturalized among us." Of this piece an American critic wrote that the fact that such costly and beautiful pieces were made here at all was a sign of "the progressive development of taste in the masses of our citizens."

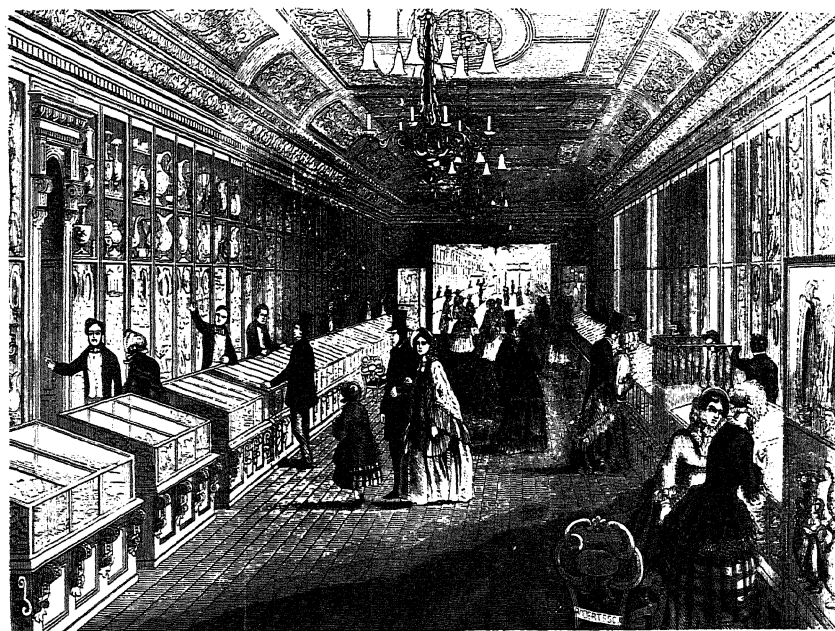
California gold, the metal that had shot like a flame through the entire country only a few years back, was the material used by the New York firm of Ball and Black for an elaborate tea service with naturalistic birds, flowers and grapes, combined in a rustic design. If the textile factories of New England could never aspire to works such as those produced by the ancient craft-traditions of the Beauvais and Gobelins factories, they could exhibit their imitation tapestries that would look even more magnificent to those who bought them—works that not only could be had at modest prices, but which illustrated events, such as the Discovery of



Lord & Taylor's store in the fifties



Tiffany & Company in the fifties



Ball, Black & Co., silversmiths, in the fifties

Their store was situated on the south corner of Murray Street,  
opposite the City Hall

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America by Columbus, that every American could understand.

Even American-made jewelry was a cause for pride and the satisfied comment that it was "not in the utilitarian arts alone that we are beginning to rival the products of the Old World." Americans also exhibited new synthetic materials which demonstrated the fact that already there were industrial minds feverishly at work creating new ideas to meet the demands for cheap luxury. There were several synthetic marbles, including ligneous marble (a composition of wood and marble). There was also *marbled iron*! A large exhibit consisted of articles in American lavaware which was not, as might be supposed, made from volcanic deposit, but represented an ingenious if hideous use of the slags from reducing furnaces. American cast-iron was glorified in the fire-grate made by a New York manufacturer, a piece heavily enameled with arched moldings in Baroque style and landscape vignettes in color, covered with plate glass.

McCormick's latest reaper, which with Powers' *Greek Slave* had shared the American honors at the London Crystal Palace, was exhibited in the New York Fair where it was equally as popular as Mrs. Reed's Fancy Work Exhibit, with its fascinating and intricate master-works in worsted, wax, shell, human hair, pearls and glass.

The American photography exhibit, the crowds in Reservoir Square were told, was the finest in the world. The Frenchman, Nadar, might photograph the earth from a balloon, but Whipple of Boston had accomplished the more difficult feat of photographing the moon from the earth; and

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Bisbee of Cincinnati exhibited one of the first photo-murals with his panorama of Cincinnati taken on six extra-large plates.

In the making of machines the Americans were on safer ground than in the making of furniture: in the machinery section there was the wonderful "steel and brass automata," the sewing machine, which had been exhibited in London in 1851 without attracting great attention, and which was still regarded as more of a curiosity than an actual tool for the American woman to use in her own home. Another invention whose democratic destiny was little suspected at the time, in spite of the novel experience it afforded the visitors at the Crystal Palace, was the elevator used to carry people up into one of the Fair's structures.

Also among the machines there was the ornate, delicately fashioned work of art—it was something between a gentleman's barouche and a parlor ornament—intended to be bought by "public-spirited citizens" as a part of their fire brigade equipment, a fire-engine that would take its place among the fire buckets decorated with family coats-of-arms, and helmets made by gentlemen's hatters. This object, though greatly admired, failed to attract the large crowds of men in tight trousers—who pointed with ivory-headed canes and examined each detail in ecstatic enthusiasm—gathered about "The Southern Belle," a 30-horsepower locomotive described as "the most beautiful steam engine ever made in this or in any other country."

Although the contemporary sculpture was even too well represented at the Crystal Palace, painting almost failed to

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be included at all. At the last moment a structure was built which gave the additional room needed for an exhibition of easel paintings; this was hung on the second floor—the first being devoted to *machinery*! Although many of the machines were new inventions, or radical developments of inventions already more or less familiar, the American Fair visitors felt far more at home downstairs than up on the second floor in the world of art. The editor of the official catalogue had done his best, however, to arouse their interest and awaken their appreciation. "We believe," he wrote, "that Art is capable of all that is claimed for it. . . ." And he looks forward to the time—to be hastened by such an event as the Crystal Palace exhibition—when "our lives are brought into direct contact with its productions, when its works are no longer a monopoly, but an everyday possession, within the reach of the mechanic and tradesman as well as the opulent and noble."

American painting was almost entirely lacking in this display. (No American Courbet had come forward with a rebel exhibition of his own.) There were a few landscapes by American painters who followed the school of Constable, and Inman was represented; but the American artists were, as a whole, too isolated, too timid, too remote from the confused dynamics of nineteenth-century industrial progress to want to associate themselves with this Fair which demonstrated the enterprise of an alien world.

The stimulus given American art on that day of triumph when Benjamin West's *Death on the Pale Horse* had started across the Atlantic to receive honors in France had had di-

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minishing returns. It was not so very far back in the past that American portraits had been painted by artists who traveled from place to place with a stock of canvases on which were almost completed figures of men, women and children, in impressive or appealing poses, needing only the head of the client to be painted in. But the general demand for daguerreotype portraits—both for the family album and for visiting cards—which arose in the mid-forties, took away even this means of livelihood from the artist. In the onrush of materialism he lost his very claim to existence, and what was left of his spirit was soon crushed out by the persecutions of Mrs. Grundy who never missed an opportunity to strike out at him as an instrument of the Devil and Original Sin—a glorifier of the nude. Mrs. Grundy, who did not admit of the existence of the nude in life, was fiercely intolerant of it in art. Even Powers' *Greek Slave*, in spite of its European honors, was attacked in the interests of propriety. In Cincinnati, a committee was formed to decide whether or not there should be exhibited before "the pure womanhood of Ohio" this female figure whose only visible clothing was not used to drape her nakedness but was placed to one side where it served to accentuate it. (Powers had, of course, his defenders who saw only purity in this figure—as well they might, since Powers had learned Canova's trick of making a nude look strictly "tailor-made"!)

American artists who ventured into the building in which art and machinery were housed together may not have been rewarded by seeing a large gathering of works by their fellow Americans, but they would have come away impressed by the

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large showing of the Düsseldorf School. This school of western Prussia, which seemed to the Americans a happy compromise between the sleek and sentimental narrative paintings of the Maclises, Mulready, Wilkies and Landseers of England, and the "Frenchified" refinement of Ingres, Géricault, Vernet and Delacroix, spoke to them in a language they could understand: and from that time its influence became a powerful one in American art, lasting all through the rest of the century, and into even the first decade or so of the next.

"No well-bestowed wealth," writes the editor of the official catalogue of the Crystal Palace in New York, "has founded long galleries of sculpture and painting, and opened their doors to the gratuitous access of the public." (It was not until many years later that American financiers developed the habit of turning back to the people, by way of cultural endowments, a part of the wealth that had been taken from them with a combination of skill, ingeniousness and finesse that was almost high art itself.)

And yet if the chromo-lithograph, a few ponderous historical paintings, and a few dead-white plaster casts of the antique were about all that there was in the way of art for the public, there was, in every American port city, an exhibition of native art of great beauty and power—free to all who took the trouble to seek it out. On the water fronts of Boston, Philadelphia and New York, anyone who cared to could see wonderful examples of the ship-builder's and the ship-carver's art, creations that surpassed most of the painting and formal sculpture in the country.

In the forties and fifties, during a Sunday afternoon's walk



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along the newly made streets near New York's Battery, with their stores crammed with pitch and molasses, red ochre, flour, cotton and tea, there could be seen, on the wharf-side where the bowsprits with their figureheads projected over the street, a stirring exhibition of sculptural forms—an esthetic experience possible only in this particular period, and one which, once the period had passed, would never be repeated. Carved, gilded and painted figures of gods and goddesses, idealized girls, "Florence Nightingale," warriors, eagles, Indians, "Jenny Lind," "George Washington," and contemporary heroes, lined the streets where merchantmen from all over the world, as well as American ships, were made fast to the wharves. Here, in the feverish days of '48 and '49, when they carried passengers to California and the gold-fields, might be seen the famous American clipper ships, built for the China trade with long, streamlined bodies that made it possible to cut down the time for the voyage from Canton to California (that the tea might not spoil in long passage). Beautiful works of functional art, precisely calculated in every detail, from the copper keel to the carved figure at the prow, their names revealed the pride of their makers and owners—the *Flying Cloud*, *Tornado*, the *Surprise* and the *Sovereign of the Seas*. There was also the *Dreadnought* that was so fast that legend credited it with the fabulous feat of making the voyage from Sandy Hook to Queenstown in nine days. On the water front Brother Jonathan proved himself to be both a man and an artist.

## GREEN MANSIONS

BROWN sandstone, cast-iron and the mechanical jig-saw enabled progressive builders after the mid-forties to reflect in their constructions the taste that had dominated interiors for almost two decades. Houses built during the period before the Civil War, and later, were solidly constructed—like the early Victorian furniture: but, fashioned as if for immortals with eternity in mind, they sprang from airy plans in which an inclination towards the Baroque struggled with a Gothic view of the Renaissance, a Nonconformist view of the Gothic, and an unrequited love for the ancient Greeks. As each element of Victorian “internal decoration” was designed as an independent creation, a work of art completely detached from its surroundings and purpose, lonely in the realm of pure idea, the houses became, as nearly as it was possible to make them, paintings in solid matter with an emphasis on chiaroscuro and what was called “the picturesque,” with the “vulgar” requirements of habitation disguised and artfully reduced to a minimum.

Early reformers who reviled those who built “dumb-bell” and “railroad” tenement flats for America’s foreign poor, were unconscious of the fact that the real offender was not the callous and avaricious landlord, but the taste of the time that forced the landlord himself to live in a house almost as unfit for habitation as the sunless, dark and airless tenement.

In the fifties, when the "brownstone front" era was getting under way, city streets in the sections where the prosperous middle-classes lived were flanked with rows of houses, al-



*From G. B. Croft's "Progressive American Architect"*

### Villa on the Hudson

The Opera House in Paris inspired American architects in the seventies, with often alarming results

most uniform, with façades made of brown sandstone blocks, trimmed with sandstone or with brick, or of brick trimmed with sandstone, with "high stoops" reached by long, straight flights of stairs, usually of stone with stone balusters, or of stone with

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iron railings and balusters. The roof was usually invisible from the street in the modified Georgian fashion. (The Mansard roof of slate, shingles, or painted tin, dormered, or with round Baroque windows, and decorated with highly ornamental iron crestings, also came into favor, quite early, for more pretentious houses.) Windows were long and narrow, undecorated, or capped with Tudor drip moldings. Long rows of these typical "brownstone fronts" of the late forties and fifties presented a formidable battle array against fresh air, sunshine, and any possible uprising in the way of frivolity and high spirits.

The usual plan for the "brownstone front" was that of the dumb-bell tenement with one or two windowless rooms between a room at the front, and one at the back, that had windows. The rooms opened into one another as well as into the long, narrow hall with a long, narrow, straight staircase at one side. At the turn of the stairs near the landing there was usually a niche with a curved top that enshrined an urn or an apochryphal goddess, in marble or plaster. The Victorians, who made no provision in their houses for such incidents of living as play or love-making, took care to provide for the eventuality of death, and the goddess's niche was, in reality, the hole in the wall necessary for the passing of the coffin.

The "palatial mansions" of the industrial nobility that began to spring up in the fifties, and which occupied "desirable sites" in the best city sections, gave the builders more latitude in the way of architectural bravura; and bay windows, stained glass windows, cupolas and conservatories, Corinthian columns and balustraded balconies in sandstone; cast-iron ornamentations; and cornices and friezes adorned with Egypto-Grecian line or-

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nement, or with late Renaissance carvings in relief, were indulged in (sometimes nearly all of them in one design!) giving a teasing foretaste of decorative riches within. As American men of wealth grew more numerous (after the Civil War) and their builders, by the simple standard of quantity, were dignified with the title of architect, the range of styles widened to include practically every kind of variation, from the familiar American Classic- and Greek-Revival, through the Anglo-Palladian and the "new Queen Anne," to the French Renaissance and Romantic Romanesque; but in nearly all of these manifestations of the established styles the rule held—that ornament was the chief aim of the builder.

If architecture is "frozen music," then American construction from the Civil War period to about two decades before the Columbian Exposition in Chicago presented a concert of congealed "break-downs," Virginia Reels, Sailors' Hornpipes and Highland Flings, not to speak of cake-walks and cancons. Yet with so much energy expended in building, there were bound to be occasional works of merit in this period (in which R. M. Hunt stands out) that preceded the works of Stanford White, J. W. Root and Louis Sullivan; and, to its glory, it produced H. H. Richardson, with his "architect's architecture" in the Romantic Romanesque style that was his distinguished contribution to nineteenth-century design.

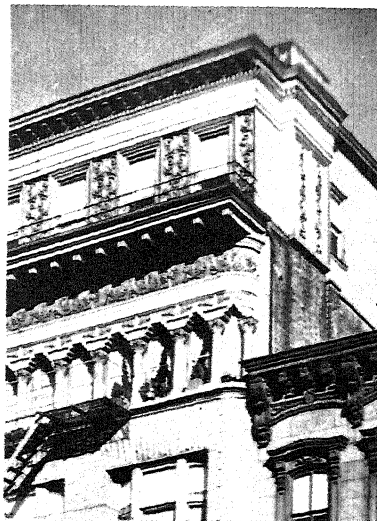
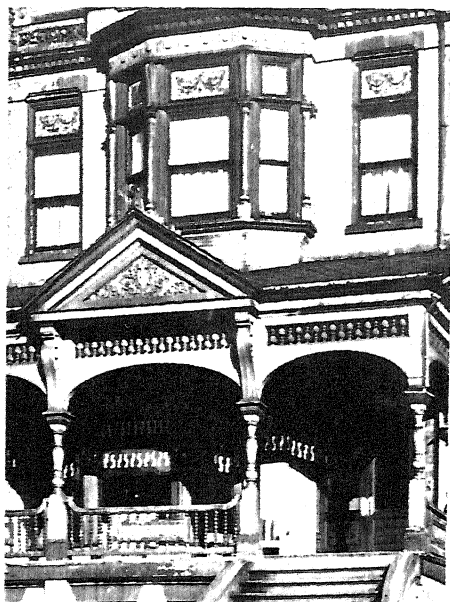
In church architecture the mid-Victorian Americans were more successful than in domestic and official building; this is perhaps explainable by the fact that here the Victorian designer was not hampered by the prosaic requirements of function, that in a church there was everything that would appeal

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to the architect of the Romantic Age—emotion, tradition, ornament—with the sky the limit! With Richard Upjohn's Trinity Church in New York as a beacon, almost every architect in the fifties had his essay into Gothic, and after the Civil War practically every town of any importance could point with pride to its Gothic building which, with its monochrome exterior covered with a "drapery" of vines, gave a comfortable air of antiquity that usually belied the town's green youth.

The rich man of the Victorian American city was not lost in the anonymity of the apartment house. His front door, his windows, with their Nottingham lace curtains, were conspicuous, inviting the inspection and espionage of the neighbors. When his barouche with the coachman's seat decorated with a richly embroidered and betasselled hammer-cloth, its liveried footmen hanging to the back by long, leather loops, drove up to his door, there was an object lesson for the humbler citizen who would then realize that if he too were thrifty, industrious, temperate of habit and ever-watchful of opportunity, a pair of shining bays and three men in livery would figure in *his* comings and goings.

"In estimating the character and merits of such a man as the late William B. Astor, we are apt to leave out of view the enormous harm he might have done if he had chosen to do it," writes James Parton. "The late Mr. Astor, with an income from invested property of nearly two millions a year," Parton continues, "could have made life more difficult than it was to the whole body of people in New York. . . . But he refrained from doing so. He paid for everything which he consumed the market price—no more, no less—and he made his purchase with



*Photographs by Tom Funk*

### Architecture is frozen music

*Upper left:* Tudor spindles, Renaissance arabesques, Greek orders and American energy characterize this façade. *Upper right:* The romantic Romanesque produced strange manifestations in the seventies and eighties. *Bottom:* The bold American front of stamped metal

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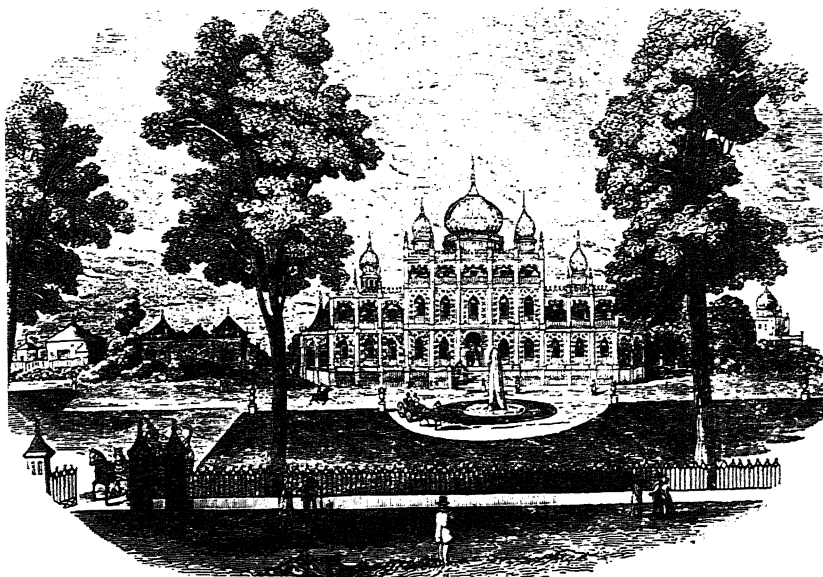
prudence and forethought. As he lived many years next door to the Astor Library, the frequenters of that noble institution had an opportunity of observing that he laid in his year's supply of coal in the month of June, when coal is cheapest."

The millionaire's coal-buying habits were not the only ones observed and imitated by those in less fortunate circumstances. When he decided that the neighborhood was becoming too cramped, or that his house was not large enough, and he built a more splendid "palace" in a new section, those who were in a position to do so followed him. In New York he moved from the named streets below Eighth Street to Park Place, from Park Place to Union Square, from Union Square to Gramercy Park and the streets in its neighborhood, and from there to Madison Avenue and the West Fifth Avenue section, all in the period covered by about thirty years, growing grander at each step in his progress.

A satire, written in the early fifties by an American who aspired to be another Thackeray, describes a typical American rich family of the period, the *Potiphars*, who build and furnish as the millionaires build and furnish. When *Mrs. Potiphar* complains that they are "getting down town," *Mr. Potiphar* knows that another "move" is in order, and that his sentimental attachment to his home will carry no more weight than it has on other occasions. There are actually shops in the next street, *Mrs. Potiphar* argues, and besides there is their patriotic duty which demands that they join "the march of improvement": why should they try to go against "the genius of the country"? They move; and *Mr. Potiphar* ironically accepts his fate. "Here, for instance, is my house," he says. "It cost me eighty-five thousand dollars.



It is superbly furnished. Every whim of table, every caprice of chair and sofa, is satisfied in my rooms. There are curtains like rainbows, and carpets as if the curtains had dripped all over the floor. There are heavy cabinets of carved walnut . . . set against



*Courtesy, New York Public Library*

### Brighton come to Bridgeport

Barnum's "Iranistan," a direct descendant of the Brighton Pavilion. It was ready for the greatest showman on earth in 1848

my last French pattern of wallpaper. There are lofty chairs like the thrones of archbishops in Gothic cathedrals, standing by the side of the elaborately gilded frames of mirrors. Marble statues of Venus and the Apollo support my mantels, upon which *or molu Louis Quatorze* clocks ring the hour. In all possible places there are statues, statuettes, vases, plates, teacups, and liquor cases. The woodwork when white is elaborated in Mores-

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co carving—when oak and walnut, it is heavily molded.”

Because he made a large sum of money in bonds the year before, he wonders why he must “convert it all into a house” that does not “hold” him comfortably, so splendid that he might as well “live in a porcelain vase,” so prodigiously “palatial” that in order to have any peace he must “skulk” into his private room and close the door on the whole thing. In fact, he says, sitting in his very new “residence” the “whole business of life” seems to him rather “whimsical.” (The story of *Mr. Potiphar* reveals that even in the fifties they had their stock American character, the successful American businessman, a rock of Gibraltar in Wall Street, a “whimsical” payer-of-bills at home, ruled by a wife who aspires to social distinction and “culture,” the source of the great American myth in which the American millionaire accumulates his vast wealth for the sole purpose of endowing orphanages and art institutions in his old age—which is spent in wishing he were a barefoot boy again, up in the hayloft with a dinner of stale bread and water, reading biographies of the great American Captains of Industry.)

*Mrs. Potiphar* has risen above the average, comparatively well-off mistress of the “brownstone front” whose life follows a pattern which she believes would be approved by Queen Victoria—*Mrs. Potiphar’s* ideal is the Empress Eugénie. Her hair is worn *à la l’Impératrice*; she wears enormous crinolines made in America in imitation of Worth, and her small son is dressed in black velvet knickerbocker suits with collars and cuffs of lace, in imitation of the costume worn by the Prince Imperial, or in a copy of the French “Highland costume” retranslated into an American version. Although in the matter of servants and their

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livery she imitates the fashions of the British aristocracy, her house is filled with what she believes is *Louis Quatorze* furniture. French music is played on the square piano in her front parlor, and on the upright "cottage piano" and the melodeon in her back parlors, while at her parties champagne is drunk from French crystal between redowas, polkas and quadrilles, and even—on occasions—the vivacious French waltz, which she admits is "fast"—but *qu'importe, c'est la mode?*" Yet for all her aspiring, *Potiphar's* wife keeps her robust American flavor, and her house has the special mark of her country on it: the extra curve, the additional curl, the heavier coat of gilt, the deeper undercutting of carving, the forthrightness and exuberance in misinterpretation of the arts that makes of it a creation not to be seen duplicated anywhere else.

The editor of a worthy paper of the forties and fifties, *The Home Journal* (which later became *Town & Country*), grows uneasy when the first crossing of the fast new paddle-steamer, the *Great Western*, brings the realization that Europe, through the marvels of modern science, is no longer far away.

"We get them (the English periodicals) now almost wet from the press, and they seem far off and foreign no longer. . . . *In literature we are no longer a distinct nation!* The triumph of Atlantic steam navigation has driven the smaller drop into the larger, and London has become the center. Farewell nationality! The English language now marks the limits of a new literary empire, and America is a suburb. Our themes, our resources, the disappearing savage, and the retiring wilderness, the free thought, and the action as free, the spirit of daring innovation, and the irreverent question of usage, the picturesque mixture of

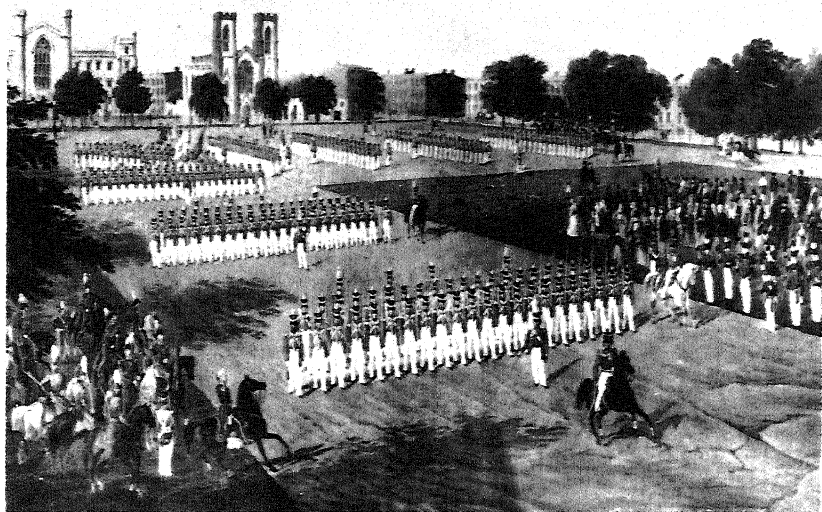
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many nations in an equal home, the feeling of expanse, of unsubserviency, of distance from time-hallowed authority and prejudice—all the elements which were working gradually but gloriously together to make us a nation by ourselves, have, in this approximation of shores, either perished for our using, or slipped within the clutch of England.”

These fears, expressed by the writer who envisioned himself as becoming the reluctant equal of Carlyle, Tennyson, Wordsworth, the Brownings, the Brontës, and De Quincey, in a new “literary empire,” showed that for the moment he had forgotten *Mrs. Potiphar* who, both consciously and unconsciously, adheres so loyally to the “genius of the country”: and what of Mrs. Grundy and her super-Victorian censorship of England and the Continent? (Her votaries walk through the European galleries of art with downcast eyes absorbing “culture” in its moral aspects only, and skipping art when it is unclothed, no matter how famous the artist or sculptor. Even the Elgin marbles they must pass by, for here is not only nudity but the pagan spirit of the unregenerate Greeks.)

Little fear need have been felt for the “unsubserviency” of a country that had Mrs. Grundy as the guiding spirit of the Ship of State, a country which she had brought to the point where it was indecent to be alone with one’s own nakedness in one’s bath. An advertisement in a Boston newspaper of the early forties states the uses of a Boston Bathing Pan and Patent Pneumatic Shower Bath in delicately persuasive terms: “Utensils which reduce the cost and trouble of bathing to a degree that enables all to enjoy the luxury and health ever attendant on those who practice daily ablution over the whole surface of the body.”

From these tentative beginnings, like the first appearance of genius manifested in a new art, the famous American bathroom emerged; an obsession with engineers and designers, it was finally brought to such perfection that the modest American,



*Courtesy of the Seventh Regiment*

In Washington Square, New York, 1852

The Seventh Regiment has turned out in the Parade Ground  
which was once the Potter's Field

gradually won over from his "hip bath," at last gained an awareness of "the whole surface of the body" (with many interesting results that were not without importance in "the march of improvement").

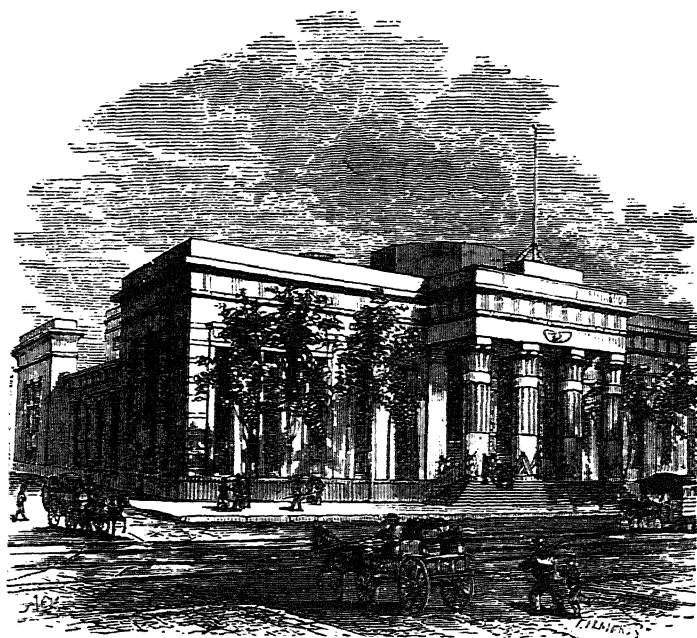
The fast steam-packets that so startlingly "approximated" the shores of Europe and America (the fastest took about

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twelve days from England to America) and which brought the new British books (which would appear in American editions, without benefit of copyright) and the latest styles in decoration and costume from England and France, also brought foreign celebrities. There were those who entertained with their music, acting or dancing, and there were also those who came to make an honest dollar by lecturing to the Americans on cultural topics, and who would, once safely at home, make more dollars by writing books on the American *mores*. Treated like gods and goddesses of a lesser hierarchy, the foreign writers availed themselves of the godlike privilege of comparing everything they saw in the alien territory with an impossible Olympian perfection. Hall, Martineau, Trollope, Frederika Bremer, Hamilton and Captain Marryat all produced books in which the same theme occurs—astonishment over the fact that the outlanders behaved like outlanders. Every packet that left with a foreign writer on board carried the gratitude of enterprising hostesses—but also their mortal fears for the inevitable and deadly book on America in which their houses, their tables, their husbands and daughters might appear thinly disguised in murderous satire. Why had no one told them about “finger-glasses”? Why had they never noticed before that their husbands used their knives as forks? And, since there was universal spitting, why *not* “spit-boxes”?

Even the beloved Charles Dickens whose coming was looked forward to with such pride and excitement—the greatest of democratic writers who would surely appreciate the land of the free!—who had smiled so genially, who had had such a good time at parties, eating the terrapin soup and the canvas-back

duck, and the good American oysters, and drinking the best imported wines, and who had paid such subtle compliments to the American woman, even he had betrayed them—the cruelest Judas of them all! There was the mud in the streets of New



The Tombs Prison, New York

Americans of the forties boasted of it as the finest specimen of Egyptian architecture outside Egypt. Dickens called it "a dismal-fronted pile"

York and other cities—had Mr. Dickens never seen mud in English streets? And that never-to-be-forgiven statement about New York's scavenger pigs—that had the run of the city, almost like the sacred cows of India. New Yorkers did not deny the pigs; but it had seemed petty in a man so great as Charles Dickens to note a few pigs when there were so many other things

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more worthy of his notice which he failed to comment upon at all. Why no word upon the new Custom House, that structure worthy of the Acropolis? Or the new Tombs Prison, that has been called "the finest specimen of Egyptian architecture outside Egypt"? Unfortunately, New Yorkers find, upon a more careful reading of Mr. Dickens' work, that he *has* commented on The Tombs Prison: "What is this dismal-fronted pile of bastard Egyptian," he asks, "like an enchanter's palace in a melodrama!—a famous prison, called The Tombs." (Almost sixty years later New Yorkers began to see that Dickens had been right, and The Tombs was torn down.)

But, although Dickens has nothing good to say of American official architecture, he *does* admit that the "red and white houses" of Boston and New York are "pretty," and that in "the broad and airy" streets of Cincinnati the "private residences" are "remarkable for their elegance and neatness," and in "their varying styles" he finds something of "invention and fancy" which "*after the dull company of the steamboat*" is "perfectly delightful."

As a man of letters, surely he has a word of praise for the marvels of modern American journalism as exemplified by those great newspapers, *The Sun*, *The Herald*, and *The Tribune*; but this hope, too, flickers out before the cruel—"To those who are accustomed to the leading English journals, or to the respectable journals of the Continent of Europe . . . it would be impossible without an extract, for which I have neither space nor inclination, to convey an adequate idea of this frightful engine in America." (Perhaps Dickens' harshness was in a measure provoked by such descriptions of him as the one that appeared in



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the Albany *Argus* of February 18, 1842. The reporter of this "frightful engine" describes Dickens as wearing a brown frock coat with a red, figured vest, "somewhat of the flashy order," and a fancy scarf cravat "fastened to the bosom in rather voluptuous folds by a double pin and chain." He also wore, on this occasion, according to the writer, "a shaggy greatcoat of beaver, or buffalo, that would excite the admiration of a Kentucky huntsman.")

The most cutting criticism of all, America was spared until the time when it could be met with a tougher skin. In a private letter to a fellow countryman, the unappreciative Dickens wrote that: "The social, political and intellectual monotony that pervades America is very oppressive: and one shudders to think of this gigantic area becoming possessed by an enormous population of units as undistinguishable from one another as peas in their habits of thought and conduct." Brother Jonathan who worked so heroically, who imitated and fawned, and who tried so hard to please his elders, got small reward for his pains. (His real trouble was, according to a Frenchman, that he had "spoiled before he was ripe.")

The picturesque is power exposed, wrote Andrew Jackson Downing, the master of the "picturesque" style that decorated the Hudson River valley in the forties. Downing's readers were probably baffled by his theories; but they liked his architecture. He was the interpreter of rural America, its pastoral poet in sticks and stones. Before Ruskin's "Stones of Venice," before Viollet-le-Duc's erudite restoration at Pierrefonds, before the Gothic proselytizing of William Morris and Eastlake, Downing

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had introduced a primer Gothic to the American countryside. Dim echoes of the glories of French medieval cathedrals, sifted down through the temperate spirit of Anglican Church architecture, the high-flown Gothic of the Pugins, and the ponderous formality of Barry's Houses of Parliament, found their way into the "villas," farmhouses and "cottage residences" built in Downing's "carpenter Gothic" and "Hudson River bracketed."

The combination of gardening and architecture seems to be a good one for democratic results: the two men whose influence was the most far-reaching in early Victorian democratic building, Paxton and Downing, were both horticulturists before they became architects. Downing, less brilliantly gifted than Joseph Paxton, had a far more direct influence upon the taste of the average man in his own country. His works and writings, though neither is free of mid-Victorian genteelisms, radiate a quiet force. He is a thorough democrat, but of the older Washingtonian, Jeffersonian schools—the aristocratic championship of the people because of an intelligent comprehension of the fact (with Downing it is a gardener's fact) that you cannot expect good results at the top if you have carelessness and mismanagement at the bottom. He also had full faith in the doctrine of perfectibility, and he believed, with a kind of religious fervor, in the "gentleman" as a highly evolved specimen—in fact, he was one himself. There was no Whitmanesque "oneing" about Andrew Jackson Downing! As he was the kind of man who could look well-groomed after a day's digging in the garden, he could hold large visions for the mass of the people without letting himself believe that shirt-sleeves are the badge of the democratic spirit.

Perhaps only America, and the America of the mid-Victorian

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period, could have produced this exotic bloom, a gardener who wrote ecstatically about weeds, a poet who kept his verses to himself, a solitary whose house was always full of people, an aristocrat of the spirit obsessed with designing houses for the middle-classes—while he himself lived all his life in a castle in the air.

A cold, distant, formal, fastidious, hypercritical man to meet, his writings reveal a bland and childlike spirit in love with "this excellent old earth" which holds for him a continual early morning surprise. "Angry books of politics have we written none; but peaceful books, humbly aiming to weave something more into the fair garland of the beautiful or useful that encircles this excellent old earth," he wrote in the library of his house at Newburgh where he could hear the bells and whistles of the boats on the Hudson River, which he revered almost in the way of the Indians, to whom it was a god.

Downing's library was a perfect setting for him. (The library of the Victorian house was usually its most expressive room, and Victorian-American biographers were in the habit of reproducing engravings of their heroes' libraries along with their portraits, as revealing as much, or more, about them.) Downing's bookshelves, with their glass doors, were in the shape of Gothic pointed arches, and over each was a large marble bust of one of his heroes—Linnæus, of course, among them. On the Brussels carpet, flowered and seamed, that snugly covered the entire floor, was black walnut Gothic furniture with carved pointed arches, blind arcading, trefoils, crockets, finials and pinnacles. Through the long French windows, set in a bay with window seats, he could look out now and then to see if all was well in his garden. Here he wrote his books, and his essays for the

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*Horticultural Magazine*, and made his careful landscape diagrams, and the plans for his houses, his Gothic "residences" and farmhouses with their deeply gabled roofs supported on "brackets" (power exposed!) his "villas in the Italian style"—with *wooden campaniles!*—and his "cottages *ornés*."

The name, "cottage *orné*," which Downing gave to the small, cheap houses of which he designed many, reveals how well he understood his average American who, although he would have been suspicious of the name had the design come from a *French* architect, relished the foreign flavor added to the homely English word as applied to Downing's thoroughly American design. It was his ability to build the cheap cottage and to give it the *orné* touch that won him rural America.

Downing's use of the French word tacked on to the homely cottage was in keeping with the spirit of the times. Average mid-Victorian Americans, never unconscious of the superior presence of England, even in their rebellions—their efforts at "unsubserviency" of taste—turned to France with a light heart, and in occasional moments of expansiveness indulged in things French. Many Victorian-American writers had a fling in French. Cooper used French quotations; Poe was fond of sprinkling his elaborate and labored prose with French words; and even Walt Whitman who described himself as "one of the roughs, a Kosmos," and who, according to Charles Eliot Norton, "combined the characteristics of a Concord philosopher with those of a New York fireman," even he decorated his home-made verse and prose with French words—where they sparkled like the diamond stud in the collarless shirt of the Colorado miner.

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Downing's houses, although their designs betrayed aspirations that soared above the common earth, were placed firmly on the ground. No newly rich exterior stairs for the owner of a Downing cottage *orné*—this would be an evidence of the “Cockneyism” for which Downing had a fierce contempt. Let those who come to the country to build, forget the way they live in the city, was his advice to lucky “forty-niners” who invaded the countryside with their shining new “ancestral estates.” (And on the subject of city houses, he wondered why the citizens of a democracy aimed to reproduce the interiors of royal palaces in houses “with a fifty-foot front.”)

Downing could see charm in the popular *Louis Quatorze* furniture, and was impressed by the French ottoman and *encoignure*. But for furnishing his villas and “cottage residences” he encouraged the use of cottage furniture with rectilinear shapes, painted in colors or in imitation of oak. Although he seems to have been ignorant of the beautiful furniture produced by the Shakers (they had not, however, reached their full development as craftsmen in his time) his “cottage furniture,” in its simplicity and striking contrast to prevalent taste, was somewhat similar to the work created in the Shaker colonies. He also praised the furniture with “spool” turning, delightful pieces made in full bedroom sets, that were simple in comparison with the scroll-saw conceits of the time, and yet were completely mid-Victorian.

The cottage furniture approved by Downing was perfectly appropriate for the sedate elegance of the average home of the time. (Downing rejoices in the fact that in nearly every farmhouse in America you would find a piano—even if there was no

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one who could play upon it.) Downing's cottage furniture had the advantage over that of the Shakers, and also that usually made in the factories, of being cheap. An advantage, however, that would make it only compulsorily appealing to most of his public who, when they could afford to furnish at all, wanted "the best of everything." (Downing was not the first nor the last public-spirited American to be puzzled by the strange inversions of democracy in the United States.)

Downing, with his excellent intentions, and his zeal for giving the "garland" of beauty to average Americans, was guilty of encouraging home-crafts which several decades later were to add home-made atrocities to those turned out by the factories. You had only to take a good sound barrel, according to Downing, and go to work with a will and in a night's work or two you would have a handsome easy chair. Or with a few deal boards, some terry cloth or reps, and a quantity of chicken feathers, you could create a luxurious ottoman, or a window seat. Downing's reason for suggesting these home-made luxuries was not involved in esthetics; these things were a part of his dream that every clerk, mechanic, farmer and small shopkeeper should be able to go home to a place that would help him to forget the maxim of "Poor Richard" that was driving Americans towards chronic restlessness, nervousness and inability to enjoy anything but work (usually for the profit of someone else). "Lose no time"—Old Ben had written, "be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary action."

Andrew Jackson Downing liked the favorite American word "palace" when applied to places open to his average American. If the "social doubters who intrench themselves in the citadel of

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exclusiveness in America," he writes in the *Horticultural Magazine*, [had been listened to] "our magnificent lake steamers, those real palaces of the million, would have no velvet couches, no splendid mirrors, no luxurious carpets."

When New York's Mayor Kingsland was struggling with his plan to give the city a large central park, Downing fought for extra acres of ground against those who argued that it was useless extravagance to give up valuable real estate to a mere park. It was time, Downing said, that "the fourth city of the world" should be able to afford "sufficient land" to give to its citizens a place "where the whole year round" they could breathe pure air and have "recreational ground for real exercise." (All this was ridiculous, everyone—even those who would benefit most by it—argued. You did not need a huge section of land in order to indulge in an occasional game of battledore and shuttlecock; the streets were large enough for rolling a hoop; no lady would be seen walking in a people's park; the open air was bad for young infants, and as for the common man in shirt sleeves, did anyone believe that he would be found sitting in a public park where he might be taken for a common man in shirt sleeves?) Genteelism had brought Americans a long way from the wilderness, and the sight of a lot of trees brought painful memories of the past.

A year before the opening of the London Crystal Palace, Downing went to Europe. From there he wrote back essays and letters that showed he was still thinking on the same old theme. "Even upon the lower platform of liberty and education that the masses stand in Europe," he wrote, "we see the elevating influence of a wide popular encouragement of galleries of art, public

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libraries, parks and grounds . . . which have raised the people in social circumstances and social culture to a far higher level than we have yet attained in republican America."

In England he has the thrilling experience of seeing two perfect specimens produced by intensive cultivation—the British "gentleman," and the largest water lily in the world.

At Chatsworth he meets the Duke of Devonshire's head gardener, the wizard Joseph Paxton, and together they visit the giant South American water lily, the "Victoria Royal" (*Victoria Regia*) which Paxton has nursed to its present enormous size with great umbrella leaves that can support the weight of a man. And Downing marvels at its beauty, and the almost equal beauty of the glass house Paxton has constructed for it. Had Downing lived, this meeting might have resulted in strange new manifestations of the cottage *orné* in which there might have been evidences of a fresh struggle in the mind of the aristocrat at heart who nourished a will to do good for the people. But, two years later, he was drowned in his own worshipped Hudson River, after the riverboat, the *Henry Clay*, on which he and his wife were traveling from Newburgh, had burst into flames.

Mr. Dickens would have found that strange peas come out of the American pod, had he been able to recognize them for what they were—fierce individualists, but wearing the same republican coat as all the rest. Downing was one of these. "You do not need any arguments to prove that *grace* is a quality as positive as electro-magnetism," he wrote. "Would that you could span the world with it as quickly as Mr. Morse with his telegraph!"



## SPINDLES, LAPPETS, AND MOURNING DOVES

AFTER the Civil War, genteel elegance came into its own. The anguish and passion of the war had brought about the destruction of many houses, beautiful with a southern expansiveness and an assured elegance; but new houses were also built, created in the spirit of the times in which there was the extravagance of unaccustomed wealth, an eagerness to employ newly developed materials and technics, and a quickening of nationalism.

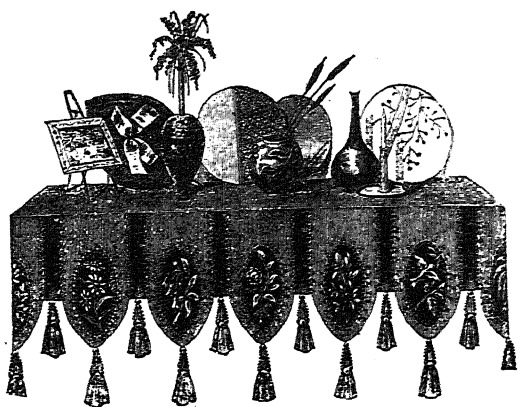
In this period early Victorianism came definitely to an end. Even the crinoline—the symbol of the Romantic Age in which woman was accorded flattering honors in exchange for innumerable restrictions—was being looked at with new eyes by leaders of fashion; and the most daring of these were already sending out test reports in a campaign to end its supremacy. As early as 1861 a fashion reporter on *The New York Herald* writes: “One of those important revolutions which have taken place sometimes in the empire of fashion has sprung upon us. The full skirt which the present generation so much affected has been repudiated, and in its place we have the quaint, old-fashioned gored skirt of our grandmothers.”

In the Washington Square and Gramercy Park sections this news would be read with excitement and something like fear.

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Would any one really *dare* to be seen without a hoop skirt? One might as well go shopping at Stewart's or Lord & Taylor's dressed in the Bloomer costume! What, the ladies in their "brownstone fronts" would be asking each other, was the world coming to? But as the newspapers, which carried these alarming reports, also continued to print the advertisements of the steel hoop manufacturers (they, too, were destined to heavy losses upon the death of Romanticism) it could all be put down to sensationalism with no foundation upon fact.

The cabinet maker of the eighteenth-century type who combined an artist's integrity with the capacity to work as hard as four men employed on factory piece work, was disappearing and his work was already looked upon as absurdly old-fashioned. John Henry Belter, the fashionable cabinet maker of early Victorian New York, who died in 1865, might have found a sudden decline in his popularity had he lived a few years longer. The taste of the '70's had no place for furniture of the kind that was produced with such great care in the Belter workshops: the finely carved rosewood and mahogany table with its marble top, the well-proportioned sofa, with its matching pair of settees, of rosewood carved in high relief and open-work in a design of grapevines and roses; and the many rosewood or mahogany chairs in a modified Louis XV style, decorated with carving and mounted on castors, their backs slightly concave and upholstered in damask, velvet or leather on the inner surface, while the outer surface was made entirely of wood, so perfectly finished that it was like fine tortoise shell to the touch. (It was Belter's boast that his furniture was so soundly constructed it could be thrown out of the window without damage.)



Design in the seventies and eighties

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Eastlake's "Hints on Household Taste," the Magna Carta of home decoration, made its American appearance in the opening years of the '70's, and was almost immediately successful in molding the taste of the younger generation which, like the half-world in France, was the chief force in introducing change. Here at last, in all the darkness and confusion, there was light: here, from out of all the clamoring foreign voices, was the message of authority. Everyone who had the slightest interest in the subject read the "Hints" and, although there was almost no one who knew exactly what it was, nearly everyone agreed that the "Eastlake" style was beautiful, elegant and "*recherché*."

The editor of the American edition in "heartily recommending" Eastlake to the American public gives the unflattering picture of taste in "The New World" with which his readers were already becoming familiar. "Our houses and their contents," he says, "our salesrooms and our upholsterers' establishments, sufficiently show that we stand in need of guidance in building, furnishing and decoration. . . ." Then he throws out his stimulating challenge: "We have intelligence and inventive faculties, and energy and wealth enough and to spare, and we well know how to use these good gifts for purposes which we consider worthy of our attention, only as yet we have not come to include art among them. When we do, who can say what now hidden aptitudes may be revealed, what great resources discovered?"

The builders, the manufacturers and the public took these words to heart: they devoured their Eastlake for rules of "guidance" and if the result was the destruction of the sound and sober propriety, and the distinguished ugliness of early Victo-

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rian furniture, and a "new Queen Anne" flourish added to architecture already uncertain of itself, there were few qualms felt, for in back of every venture in Tudor, Gothic and early Renaissance there was the doughty support of the recognized leader.

There were conservatives, naturally, who refused to join in the desertion from the established style. (Or followers of William Morris who saw that beyond Eastlake other forms were possible of creation.) One of these wrote: "Immense furniture mills are set up, and to such perfection has machinery attained that the logs go in one door and come out another fashioned in that remarkable style known as 'Eastlake,' and which has become so much the fashion that grace and elegance are in danger of becoming taboo before long."

The '70's that saw the gradual dissolution of the crinoline also saw the decline of the Baroque from the exuberance of the earlier period to the self-consciously "artistic" phase when the dashing C- and S-curves were contracted and stiffened—the after-effect of the skirmish with the Gothic. But the Baroque by no means lost its hold on design, and in spite of the straight lines and geometric patterns adopted out of deference to Eastlake, the Baroque rhythms persisted, if often half-suppressed and made to serve in strange ways as in the curved legs of an otherwise all-Gothic chair.

Stung by harsh criticism of their taste, and stimulated by the increasing demands for American-made articles that continued even during the war, and in spite of panics and depressions, American manufacturers, full steam ahead, made a bold dash for the mysterious hidden world of the arts. Dutifully respecting

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the superior knowledge of their fellow producers in England and on the Continent (without knowing very much about their work), and slightly intimidated by the bewildering richness of the foreign styles, the Americans managed to borrow a little from everywhere and then assembled the bits together, adding a gratuitous element of their own. The Louis-Philippe key-ring back chair might find itself in an American version with a strange crossing of the Thonet bent-wood chair.

The Eastlake ebony cabinet with incised lines and faïence plaques would have engendered a "parlor suite" of ebonized wood with line decorations filled in with bright gold, the spring seats of the sofas and chairs upholstered in damask with a magenta ground on which were large gold flowers, while thick, twisted fringes of gold, black and purple worsted hung worm-like from the seats and arms. Traceable to the Eastlake so-called "Gothic" chair would be a misbegotten spring-seat affair composed of ball-turning, spindles, grooving, and carving, with thick unturned legs extending outward from the back, and in front two low supports remotely "Gothic" in shape.

There were also the occasional tables and small stands of the tripod type which borrowed Eastlake features such as incised line ornament, Jacobean knob-finials, and the use of broken lines instead of turning. The American designers often increased the "elegance" of the smaller tables and stands by copying the French and adding long chains, inspired by the classic incense-burning tripod, hanging them from the tops and looping them up at the beginning of the base.

Inspired from a source which was itself lacking in brilliance the American "Eastlake" products could be described by Ros-

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setti's summing up of certain English paintings that preceded the Pre-Raphaelites: "Commonplace is a laudatory term, and imbecility a not excessive one."

Although the innovations introduced by Eastlake inclined towards "severity" (that is, compared with other popular styles) there was no danger of a return to the primness of what was called at the time "Revolutionary furniture" (meaning that produced in Colonial times). The French-Anglo "modern comfortable" style had already been seized upon by Americans as something they could not only enjoy but which suited perfectly the American democratic spirit which encouraged everyone—provided he could pay his way—in the belief that the best was none too good for him. To the "modern comfortable" style this country made its own distinctive contribution in the good American rocking chair, the rostrum and look-out tower of Mrs. Grundy in which, since the beginning of the century, she had creaked the hours away, stitching her succession of patchwork and appliqué quilts, and crocheting her antimacassars and tidies while she recited the saga of her region. As Mrs. Grundy progressed in elegance, her rocker also went through many mutations until it reached its apotheosis in that wonderful monstrosity, the "stationary rocker," covered in flowered plush and decorated with embroidered lappets, its seat balancing on a stationary base with a portentous creaking of springs.

The vogue for Japanese design, in which America's own Whistler had been one of the keenest pioneers, brought a flourishing crop of bamboo "novelties" in fancy tables and chairs. What-nots, bookcases and even entire bedroom "suites"

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were made of bamboo combined with cane and matting.

Japanese matting was also used for floor coverings as well as on walls as dadoes, capped by ebony moldings. A particularly "*recherché*" cane object was created in the '70's; a plant stand, which also held a goldfish bowl, with "Vandyked" lappets of velvet embroidered at home in "purse silk" and gold thread in a design of fishes and flowers.

American mantelpieces were soon beautified, like those of England, with collections of Japanese fans of the round type with straight stick handles, inserted with artful carelessness among the iron mantelpiece "garnitures," the bronze "Greek" oil-lamps, the majolica vases filled with cat-o'-nine-tails and silver grasses, the blue glass bowls of gilded wood shavings, and the Bohemian glass vases filled with paper "spills" for lighting the fire. Seized with admiration for the Japanese the Genteel Female forsook for a time her china painting and her Berlin wool-work, and set about painting or embroidering screens in the Japanese manner. But the Anglo-Japanese style, in which many interesting furniture pieces were made in England, failed to find popularity in this country.

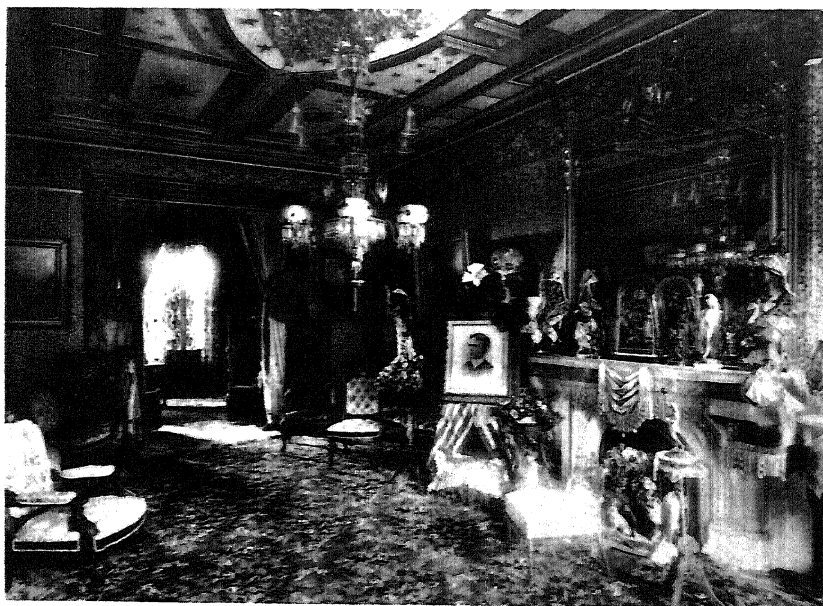
Eastlake's immortal book, addressed to the popular mind, inspired other writers to do their share in the good work of awakening the home-owner to a consciousness of the importance of his surroundings upon his daily life. Harriet P. Spofford was one of the first Americans to write on decoration; her book, "Art Decoration as Applied to Furniture," which appeared in the late '70's, became an American classic, almost as popular as the famous "Hints." The title, it will be noted, lacks the almost blushing modesty of Eastlake's; and with consistent self-





### Japanese influence

Revealed in the bamboo screen and the embroidered sofa cushion. The standing lamp has a parasol lamp-shade typical of the eighties and nineties



*Courtesy of Tom Funk*

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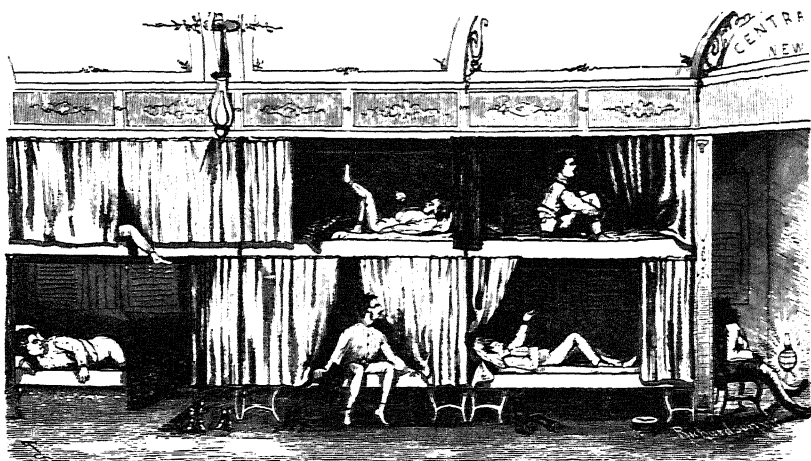
assurance Mrs. Spofford makes startling statements of the kind that some of her readers must have recognized as gracefully optimistic exaggerations of fact. For example, she says with ladylike emphasis that: "There is no worthy or industrious, however humble, citizen of this country, out of all its million, who has not his comfortable bed and his clean sheets." (Were there, one wonders, no worthy or industrious, if humble, citizens in the tenements on Church Street in New York, or even in the Old-World grime and blackness of its infamous Five Points, where cholera and typhus raged, but where there were few beds of any description, and fewer sheets?)

Mrs. Spofford's audience, however, was of the class which had either outgrown Church Street, or had no idea of what kind of life was lived there—a class determined to do the correct thing, wear the right clothes, and to surround itself with "art decoration." "The dining-room," they learned from Mrs. Spofford, "is an excellent place for pictures of a curious nature, and those involving memorabilia; for besides their pictorial office, they serve to stimulate the conversation which is so necessary to a cheerful meal and make the groundwork for general observation among guests newly met, or with but little in common."

In the drawing-room (the Spofford elegance does not permit the word "parlor") her readers are told that there should be "a gayly colored china platter, pierced and hung upon hooks," pedestals with "marbles and casts," antique vases "or their imitations," brackets, and jardinières—"and all the thousand and one momentous trifles." They must also have a davenport, a what-not and corner shelves, and, by all means, a cabinet in Eastlake style, "partly drawers, partly doors, partly open

shelves" with its carving in sunk relief, its "zig zag, trefoil and conventional foliage," its brass or iron fittings, and faïence plaques, and its fringed curtains to draw over the recesses that are without doors.

In this monumental piece are enshrined "all the treasures that belong nowhere else"; here, peeping out from behind the



SARATOGA SPECIAL, 1872

"gay" curtains, or lined along the open shelves of natural wood with their "modernized Gothic" carvings, are "choice minerals, atoms of priceless china, the *too* precious album [*sic!*], historical relics, trophies of travel, little dainty curios and fragile things that may have fallen into one's possession."

In "the things that may have fallen into one's possession" this writer gives the keynote of decoration during the late Victorian period when rooms represented stratas of accumulated deposit. The strong acquisitive sense of the Victorians had free expres-

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sion without any check that might have been imposed by the mere physical fact that a room can hold just so much and no more. In the Victorian room there was always some spot that could be found where two objects would do as well as one. In fact, writes Mrs. Spofford, "provided that there is space enough to move about, without walking over the furniture, there is hardly likely to be too much in the room."

The fat, avid, juicy roots of Victorianism that went down deep for a firm hold on life, and which nourished the mania for collecting, also kept alive the necrolatry that had existed even before the war. This was expressed in the pictorial mourning cards that were sent to relations and friends; the love of pictures with deathbed scenes (Landseer's *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner* was a favorite in America in oleolithographic reproductions. This was the painting of which Ruskin had written: "It is one of the most perfect poems or pictures—I use the words as synonymous—which modern times have seen . . .") and the novels in which the Genteel Female wandered war and sweet through many chapters until, in the middle of the book, she took to her invalid's chair where she lay, surrounded by pale flowers, breaking every one's heart with the gentle radiance of those who are soon to be "called to Heaven."

But far more popular than even the funereal art, and the story with the unearthly heroine, were the poems about babies that had gone or were about to go to Heaven, which Mrs. Sigourney had made an almost obligatory theme for the American woman poets as a test of their skill. In every issue of the fashion magazines there was to be found—among the patterns for crocheting tidies, knitting spencers, embroidering watch-pockets, and

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for making "frame-work" jackets and chatelaines of silk cords and beads—the inevitable dead or dying babe, immortalized in verse that was often the creation of a Victorian spinster enjoying vicariously both the joys of motherhood and the morbid pleasure in its griefs. In "Mamma's Tribute" Miss Randolph writes:

"The house itself is holy  
For an angel loved it best;  
And the commonest things are sacred,  
That his baby hands have pressed."

And Mrs. Bell writes even more poignantly of "Dear Little Hands."

"Dear little hands! I loved them so!  
And now they are lying under the snow.  
Under the snow, so cold and white,  
And I cannot touch them or see them to-night.  
They are quiet and still at last. Ah me!  
How busy and restless they used to be.  
But now they can never reach up through the snow;  
Dear little hands! I loved them so!"

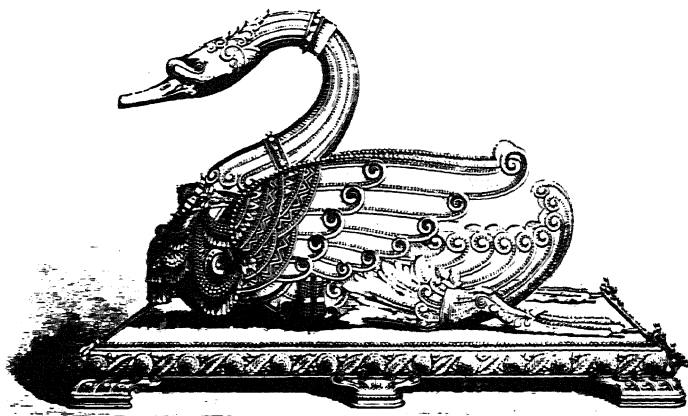
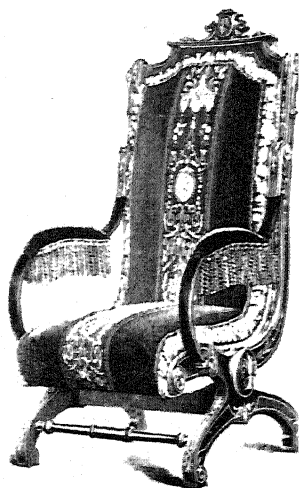
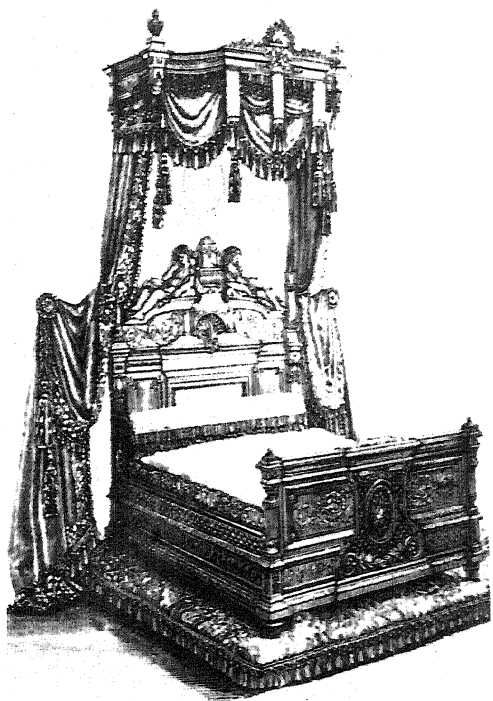
Great international expositions have a way of appearing in times of trouble; if dedicated to international peace they open during a war—if intended to mark industrial progress they open in a time of financial depression. The Philadelphia Centennial and International Exposition of 1876 was no exception to this rule. It opened its gates only three years after the serious panic

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that had resulted from the years of Civil War inflation. Unlike the New York World's Fair of 1853, it marked a definite turning point in American design. It was the milestone that divided, esthetically speaking, adolescence from maturity. For the past twenty years or so this country had been turned in on itself, absorbed in its own destiny, and whatever ideas it had received from abroad were for the most part second-hand. Now, when perceptions were quickened by the insecurity of the present which balanced dizzily between disaster and tantalizing prospects of a future brightness, there were the stimulating displays of foreign countries, their past glories as well as the best of their present products.

The headiest of all the new impressions was in the field of architecture where the "new Queen Anne" was the style of the hour. American architects could now reason with patrons who at least had seen enough examples of a style other than the Greek Revival (and the products of jerry-builders) to listen to arguments in favor of a "true American architecture."

Over ten million people visited the buildings under the trees in Fairmount Park, marveling at Corliss' engine, and looking apathetically at Krupp's guns (one could reach the saturation point in the matter of guns) and gazing at the fountain and the flowers (the absence of heart-shaped beds was a novelty) and listening to the bands playing selections from Offenbach. And at least nine million foolish or facetious questions were asked concerning "Mr. Bell's little boxes" with mouth- and ear-pieces connected with a 200-foot line over which voices could be distinctly heard. (In another year the first reporter to send his story by telephone would "cover" a lecture delivered by Alex-



In the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, 1876

One of the great favorites with the crowds was the carved bed of amaranth wood by Pottier & Stymus of New York. The rocking chair was a patented affair of great ingeniousness. Tiffany & Company exhibited the swan of hammered silver, a fruit dish

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ander Graham Bell in Salem, and transmit it over the telephone to another reporter sixteen miles away.)

And at least ten million jokes and puns were called forth by the new "letter-writing machine" which the Genteel Female, even were she a student at Vassar and on the ladies' cricket team, would pass by with a shake of her bustled skirt as something completely outside her world. And it looked ugly and unpromising enough to fail in attracting the attention of even the most "Bloomerish" young women, this early example of the machine that was to bring about the annihilation of the cult of the Genteel Female, and to send her out into the world to mistype its letters, raise havoc in its offices and to give, in a cool and confident voice, assorted misinformation over its telephones.

Iron was the triumphant material of the Centennial Exposition. Its value as a practical material had been demonstrated in various recent constructions, the most notable among them the railroad bridge built at St. Louis only two years before by James B. Eads. But the Victorians would not have been true to themselves had they accepted a material for its utilitarian value alone. Once they became convinced of the desirability of a thing, considerations of appropriateness and convenience in its particular applications never stood in their way. If iron was the material of the hour with exciting possibilities for future construction, there was no reason that they could find why it should not be equally interesting when used in decoration. If bridges, railway stations and steam engines were made of iron, then why should there be any hesitation about using iron for Corinthian columns (James Bogardus' cast-iron fronts were familiar sights now in the business sections of cities); for cornices and

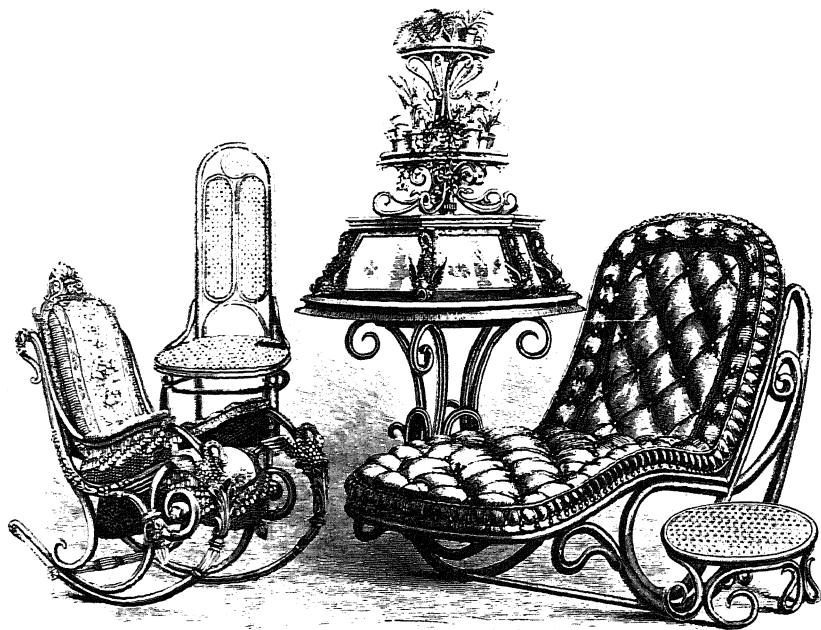


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friezes, and corbel brackets in the "Raphael style"; and for ornamental balconies with pagoda canopies? (A two-story house was built in New York at about this time with no less than four of these balconies.) And why should exteriors have a monopoly on this attractive material? Why not hat-stands of cast-iron decorated with the shield of the United States, and the Stars and Stripes, painted in bright colors? And why not iron statues inside as well as out of doors? And iron mirror frames, brightly polychromed; and iron card trays, like those of china and glass, in the shape of two cupped hands; and iron tea services of "hollowware," and fruit dishes of iron in "artistic open-work" design? And now, since the Philadelphia Exposition displays, why not iron beds with gilded and painted decorations?

The metal beds were a trifle startling at first; and it was going to take a good deal of propaganda in the interests of hygiene before the low "French" bed was discarded in its favor (the English four-poster bed was unpopular with the Victorian-Americans who had completely repudiated the eighteenth century); and it was going to be particularly hard to give up the new and handsome object that was the chief glory of the fashionable bedroom set in black walnut, the bed with the very high rectilinear headboard, and slightly lower footboard, decorated with intricate carving and inlay in "Eastlake style." For reassurance that the new ideas of hygiene—considered to be ridiculously extreme—had not taken firm hold, there was the bed in the grand style that spurred the ambitions of would-be Lily Langtrys and Lola Montezes who saw it at the Fair. It had cost \$12,000 to manufacture, they were told, and was a miracle

of luxury with a frame of amaranth wood inlaid with American walnut, heavily carved. Above its headboard of tufted satin was a canopy of royal "basket" satin, and of the same material was a bed-cover elaborately trimmed with lace.



### Viennese Bent-Wood

On exhibition at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. Practical and simple as first designed by Thonet of Vienna, bent-wood furniture was also elaborated like the above

Another luxurious object in the Exposition was "the first rocker and reclining chair." It had a frame of ebony decorated with gilded lines and was covered in striped "plush broché," trimmed with "puffed-in" satin. The seat and back were a solid piece attached to the base by a pivot, and the arms were of spring steel covered over with plush. You rocked or reclined

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according to your fancy, your relaxation made complete by remembering the words in the Exposition catalogue, in which this patent rocker was spoken of as a creation equal in beauty to the chairs and sofas at "Knole" or "Moor Park," in England; and, moreover, that "although they may have looked as well as the rocker, they certainly lacked its easy motion."

Before the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, Oriental rugs were classified by most Americans under the general term of "Turkey," and it was usually the Kidderminster, or American Wilton, or Axminster, decorated with designs in imitation of Owen Jones, that was the final selection for the front and back parlors, no matter how bright and cheerful the "Turkey" rugs might have looked in the shops. The Exposition, with its dazzling display of the weaving crafts of Asia Minor, opened up a fascinating new world of design. This led to the explorations in Near Eastern products in general which were to bring such fantastic results later on.

On the days of the Centennial Exposition's official opening and closing New York, as well as Philadelphia, blew whistles and set off fireworks, for the Philadelphia Fair had celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of American independence. It also marked the beginning of the long twilight of late Victorianism in which unclassifiable forms emerged that betrayed the struggles between the manufacturer and the amateur who contended not only with each other but with conditions, striking out with impotent gestures like swimmers under water. The one wanted to make money, while the other, with William Morris, wanted "to build a shadowy isle of bliss, midmost the beating of the steely sea."

## THE PLUSH-DRAPED FRONTIER

**B**E EARLY English before it is too late," Oscar Wilde advised Americans—but a trifle too soon. (Victorian decoration had by no means run its course in the '80's, and the Edwardian "National Guard" school that followed was to dominate for many years before we turned back, with hesitancy and misgivings, to the English-inspired work of early days.)

That Wilde's American tour was a "show" on the Barnum plan, and that the exemplar of British culture was a second-rate man with first-rate ideas (but not his own) did not lessen the importance of his lectures to his audiences. His tour, with the publication of "Leaves of Grass" and the opening of the Union Pacific Railroad, was probably one of the most important cultural events in nineteenth-century America.

Before Whitman, American intellectual leaders were gentlemen-of-letters who addressed their readers in a distinguished, eighteenth-century prose style in which the American flavor and "Americanisms" occurred only by accident. In Whitman's writings American readers had the thrilling experience of recognizing themselves as a people distinct and apart, with their own language and their own point of view—and admirable, and even enviable, in their apartness. At last, after so many years of following—or dodging—the British pattern, they were presented

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with one that was home-made, and easy and pleasant to live up to—a portrait of themselves better than true.

(It was the intellectuals, however, who were eager to identify themselves with Whitman's plain American; the middle-class rejected the extended "powerful comrade's" hand, and laughed at his democratic rhapsodizing—no one could tell *them* that it was possible to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, or "real" poetry out of the talk you heard in the street. And this Walt Whitman, they might add, besides being a poor writer was a scandalously immoral one!)

Wilde presented another pattern; the existing American as seen through the eyes of a sympathetic (and on the whole, sincere) Englishman who suggested certain improvements with the flattering implication that they would make him an ideal type and one not less, but *more* American.

"You, at least, are young," he told Americans; and he saw hope in the "very absence of tradition" which might be the source of "freedom and strength." There was a great deal in Wilde's favor for complete success among the barbarians of the United States. He was Irish to begin with, with the Irishman's soft, musical voice and his feminine ability to sense the temper of an audience and to "play up" to it; he was young, and Americans often forgive the young for things they will not tolerate in the old, particularly those who are presented to them as occupying a position of recognized superiority. And he was, probably for the first and last time in his life, in earnest—and Americans forgive a man a good deal if they see that he is serious about the thing from which he is making a living. Wilde was fond of telling the English about the sign he was supposed to

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have seen in a Leadville "dancing saloon"—"Please Do Not Shoot the Pianist. He is Doing His Best." (This is Wilde's phraseology, not Leadville's!) Wilde, no doubt, would have been surprised had he heard something of the same thing spoken about himself—yet it was probably this attitude, more than a hunger for culture, and the thrill of seeing *Bunthorne* in the flesh, that made a large part of his audience listen to the lectures and stay to the bitter end.

The monkey get-up that was a part of D'Oyly Carte's publicity plan of having the hero of *Patience* act the *Bunthorne* rôle outside the Standard Theatre where the piece was playing in New York, was an advantage to Wilde in a way not foreseen by his promoter. (In the Gilbert and Sullivan satire, as written, *Bunthorne* had not been intended as a caricature of Wilde but of Swinburne; but as Wilde gained notoriety in the affections of estheticism he became identified with *Bunthorne* although the character *Archibald Grosvenor* originally had been intended to represent him.) Dressed in his satin knee-breeches, with his flowing hair and flowing tie, Wilde was able to deliver his startling ideas and theories with more success than had he worn the conventional evening clothes of the time which would have accentuated not only the strangeness of his words in their affected Oxonian accent, but the far-from-conventional face and manner of the lecturer. With the whole thing grotesque and unreal his audiences were in a mood to listen for what truth and common sense there might be in the man's words.

And Americans had an Athenian passion for oratory. When Henry Ward Beecher delivered a sermon in Brooklyn the ferries

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were loaded down with the crowds hungry to hear him. Lincoln had a following from town to town when he was an itinerant lawyer with an amazing gift for speech-making. The Temperance Movement gained its great hold on the people in the '70's and '80's mainly because the speakers in its behalf were more melodramatic and gave a "better show" than the actors in the theatres. Even in competition with the great virtuosity of American speakers, Wilde, with his new subject, and his *Patience* fame, would have had to be pretty bad if he failed to attract and hold American audiences.

He stung them into attention by using the Irishman's disarming frankness which sounds more convincing than the truth.

"You have heard," he said, "of two flowers connected with the esthetic movement in England and said (I assure you, erroneously) to be the food of some esthetic young men. Well, let me tell you that the reason we love the lily and the sunflower, in spite of what Mr. Gilbert may tell you, is not for any vegetarian fashion at all . . . these two lovely flowers are in England, the most adaptable for decorative art."

And:

"You have heard *Patience* for a hundred nights, and you have heard me for one only. It will make, no doubt, that satire more piquant by knowing something about the subject of it, but you must not judge of estheticism by the satire of Mr. Gilbert."

Wilde was charming with his look of an inspired eighteenth-century mystic poet, his gentleness and good humor, his high spirits, and wonderful freshness and eagerness, and his sense of the ridiculous that had not yet crystallized into the wit produced by a set formula, and which consisted mainly of inverted apho-

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risms. After his first lecture at Chickering Hall in New York the invitations began to arrive at the Grand Hotel, where he stayed, in gratifying numbers. The newly-built "brownstone fronts" with their imposing white marble trimmings opened their doors wide to him, and the lecturer on "The Renaissance in England" was given the opportunity to see the "American Renaissance" in its most spectacular and most costly manifestations. Receptions were given in his honor in suites of rooms filled with plush-covered furniture, elaborately carved and gilded, whose walls and ceilings, in imitation of those at the new Vanderbilt house, on Fifth Avenue and 52d Street, were of breath-taking magnificence with a bewildering mixture of neo-Pompeian, Vanbrugh and Charles Garnier ornamentation—griffons, masques, terminal figures, and carved and gilded herald-cupids, and complicated *trompe l'œils* that simulated tapestry, gardens and architectural details. And in such princely surroundings, while New York in its newest Worth dresses, and Poole claw-hammer evening suits, waited respectfully, Oxford's newly-hatched celebrity proceeded up the main staircase with his hostess, while the orchestra played *God Save the Queen*.

Acting a caricature of himself, Wilde was, of course, a figure ready-made for ridicule, and an almost too-easy target for the American Press (the wonder of the world for its irrepressible, callous, irreverent and adolescent humor and its punning, and often rhyming, headlines—in strange contrast to the sentimentality and grim respectability of average Victorian-American life). Harvard lampooned and jeered, and Boston, although attentive, smiled its Plymouth Rock smile (it had no need of any





*Photograph; Newdick, N. Y.*



*Photograph by N. Sarony, N. Y., 1882*



## Oscar Wilde in New York

American hostesses in their "genteel" interiors listened with interest to his ideas on culture

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Oxford stripling to talk to *it* about culture! It did not like, either, Wilde's remarks about the dowdiness of the women at Brook Farm, of which it might not entirely approve itself—but the colony on the Charles was too near home for Boston not to suspect the witty lecturer of including *Boston* women in his unflattering observations). In Philadelphia, the citizens of the "Athens of America" listened with polite reservations to the exponent of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. (From Philadelphia, Wilde made the pilgrimage over to Camden to see Walt Whitman. The "old falcon" gave the "big, splendid boy" milk punch and several hours of his lovely companionship: Socrates receiving a brilliant *éphèbe* from across the seas. After Wilde had gone, with the poet's blessing on his head, Whitman said of him that he was "genuine, honest and manly." Wilde, the Celt, would have seen instantly that no pose would hold out before the saintly sincerity of America's democratic poet—the most sublime poseur of the age.)

It was beyond what Poe had called "Appalachia," that Wilde's words were listened to with complete respect and earnestness. "Genius and taste are appreciated in the young, green West," Mrs. Sigourney said in the '40's. At the time of Wilde's visit, the West was still young, and it was still exceedingly green. Like many other Englishmen of the nineteenth century, Wilde had probably formed his idea of the Western United States from reading Cooper's "Leatherstocking" novels, the pre-Hollywood scenarios in which historical facts were the supporting framework for idealized characters, Americans and Indians alike, who were as good as the gold in the Rocky Mountains,

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or as vicious as the rattle-snakes lying coiled in the prairie grass. "It was a matter of course," Mrs. Cooper wrote, of her husband, "that he should dwell on the better traits of the picture [of the Indian] rather than on the coarser and more revolting, though more common points."

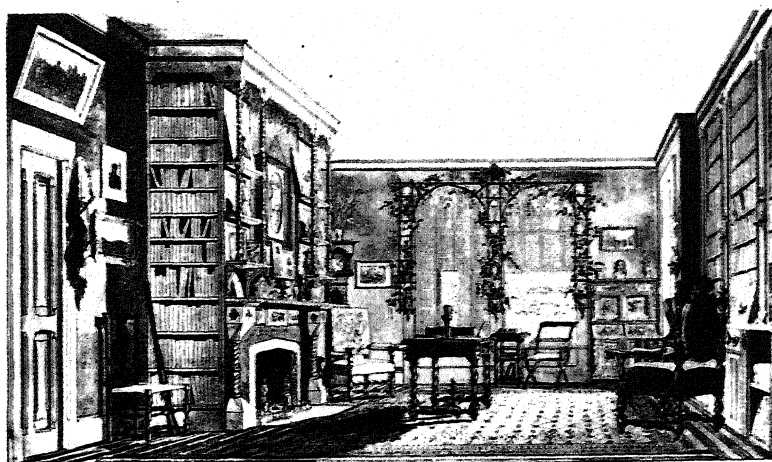
With remembered scenes from Cooper's "Westerns" passing in slow motion through his mind, Wilde must have experienced something of a shock as he penetrated the frontiers beyond "Appalachia." Here were cities and towns with unpronounceable Indian (or Greco-Indian!) names, laid out as if by a Baron Haussman for the glory of another Napoleon III, with splendid, enormously wide avenues (very few of them with any paving at all) that ended abruptly in plain or wilderness, and whose sparse sprinkling of buildings emphasized the overambitious hopes of the town-planners. Porticoed banks of stone and wood guarded the millions of dollars worth of bullion deposited by men who only a few years ago might have been down on their knees watching for specks of gold in a pan of muddy water; while imposing Town Halls of marble, or imitation marble, in colored Italian Gothic style, or in the ponderous, forbidding style of the Romantic Romanesque, preserved in their archives records of no later date than twenty-five or thirty years back. In these cities and towns the business sections looked as if they were inhabited by a people who never went to bed, while the "residential" sections looked as if they were inhabited by people who never woke up. "I wonder that criminals don't plead the ugliness of your city as an excuse for their crimes," Wilde said to the reporters in Cincinnati.

Still more crime-inspiring were some of the interiors of the

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houses in these newly born cities and towns beyond the Ohio River. The houses, of wood or of stone (the business buildings were often of iron molded and painted in imitation of stone), with their cupolas and turrets, and "Norman" towers, their bay windows and "piazzas," and their ornamentations of stamped metals, or of factory-made scroll work, "planted on," had the interiors they deserved. The walls were covered with what Wilde had called "bad" papers with wide colored stripes in maroon and blue, or golden scrolls, or "Raphael" designs. There were flock papers, or imitation embossed leather in gold and silver, and friezes in "Etruscan" designs, or with "nature" motifs such as dragon-flies, squirrels, and pink geese flying among blue clouds. Portières, at all the folding-doors, were of heavy plush, or machine-made tapestry, or of heavy silk with Roman stripes, or Byzantine geometrical designs. Mantel shelves were draped with lambrequins of velvet ornamented with passementerie, or embroidered silk, or of stamped leather. Ordinary gas fixtures and those for the new Welsbach lights that were a substitute for the costly electricity, had their practical use disguised by ornamental metal work in the form of flowers and vines, while elaborate globes of ground or molded glass took many fancy shapes—fluted like pumpkins, or flaring like lilies, or spiraled like molasses candy; they also were brightly colored, red, pink or orange, or they were decorated with a design in imitation of lace, in which case they were delicately tinted. Stained-glass windows of odd shapes and in odd positions, with Latin or "Olde English" mottoes, threw lurid lights into the rooms and on staircases. (Ceilings of stained glass were considered especially elegant, particularly for the house that pos-

essed an art collection.) Rustic window treatments were frequently seen—they were considered “poetic” for the libraries of literary men. A trellis was built around the window, the wood of which was left in its natural state, and a “pretty



A trellis gives the poetic touch in the seventies

In this library “Ik Marvel” (Donald G. Mitchell) wrote his *Reveries of a Bachelor*, which brought sweet sentiments into thousands of American homes

effect” was gained by placing pots of flowers and vines on this rustic Swiss chalet-like structure.

The furniture in these interiors presented an interesting history of practically all the styles that had been developed and adopted since the first craftsman in ancient Greece had discovered that with a few animals’ skins and some pieces of wood he could make an object that would support a man’s weary body. There were mongrel Empire pieces, and half-breed Louis-Philippe and Second Empire, Louis XIV and XV, as well as the

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new "Eastlake Gothic" pieces. The hostesses who had received Wilde in "genteel" surroundings of the most fashionable type must have felt personally commended when he said: "Congratulate yourselves if you have done something strange and extravagant and broken with the monotony of a decorous age."

In his journey from New York to San Francisco, the devotee of the Pre-Raphaelite school must have seen, in the private art galleries of American millionaires, an overwhelming array of Daubignys, Troyons, Rosa Bonheurs, Meissoniers, Gérômes, Detailles, and Alma-Tademas and a formidable acreage of canvas covered with Albert Bierstadt's Teutonic sublimities that rendered a record of Rocky Mountain scenery to the gods. And he would have encountered, in homes whose owners were not of the millionaire class, interspersed among the Healy "ancestral portraits" and the Brady hand-painted daguerreotypes displayed on their gilt and plush easels, steel engravings of Landseer's *Monarch of the Glen*, *Waiting*, and *Dignity and Impudence*; Böcklin's *Island of the Dead*; and, in the most "cosmopolitan" homes, Fortuny's *Snake Charmers*.

And almost invariably, everywhere he went, he would have seen plaster replicas of the Venus de Milo in every size, from the heroic to the small statuette used as a paperweight. (It was the Americans of the '70's and '80's who made the rediscovery of the Venus de Milo—almost fifty years after she had been found on the Greek island and presented to the King of France for the Royal Collection in the Louvre Palace. This did not mean that Mrs. Grundy had relaxed in her crusade against the nude in art; Americans of the '70's and '80's were as suspicious of art in general, particularly from a moral point of

view, as early Victorians had been. The Academy in Philadelphia opened its doors on certain days "for women only" that



New Year's Day in the eighties

Punch was served all day in hospitable houses. Men, in evening clothes, made the rounds, stopping only a short while in each house filled with its attentive hostesses

they might come and view the modern works of sculpture and the plaster casts from the antique, without being seen doing so by masculine eyes; and in Boston the young woman who sold tickets at the Art Museum was told by one of Mrs. Grundy's priestesses that she ought to be ashamed of herself for working

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in such a place, and that the least she could do to prove that she was pure in mind was to make aprons for all the nude statues in the galleries. The Venus de Milo, almost alone, escaped the taboos. She was welcomed into American homes of all kinds where, like the Japanese fan, she became a symbol of "Art," and lifted every room in which she was placed into the admired realm of the "artistic." Her charm for late Victorians in this country is rather difficult to account for, considering the prejudices which she surmounted with Olympian ease. It may have been that it was her essentially Baroque attitude, the double movement expressed by her body, which had an irresistible appeal for the Victorians: or that she was seen as an idealized portrait of Mrs. Grundy herself, the Good Woman who looked capable of running the affairs of a home—or a nation—one with no nonsense about her. Lübke, the German art-historian of the period, spoke of her "mysterious unapproachableness"; she was, he said, "grandly serious" and not "*a love-demanding woman*"! With unerring instinct for their own pattern, the Victorian-Americans had taken "Venus" into their homes disguised as a "Goddess of Liberty"—and as such her lack of upper drapery could be overlooked. The popular interpretation of the Greek statue was later supported by an American archeologist in a book in which he offered the hypothesis that the "Venus" was not intended to be Aphrodite at all, but was the *Wingless Victory* that had stood in a shrine outside the gates of the Acropolis at Athens.)

Oscar Wilde, racing across the Continent (at thirty-five or forty miles an hour) in his Union Pacific "Palace" Pullman car, "carpeted in elegant Brussels" and luxurious with twenty-five



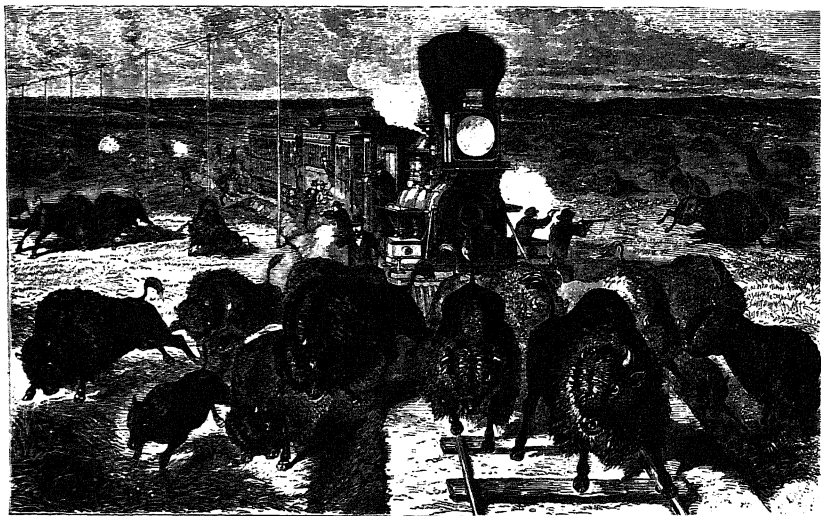
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sofas and a frescoed ceiling in lavender, crimson and gold, was a superlatively sophisticated and exotic figure with his otter-trimmed greatcoat, his romantic cane which had been cut, according to his tale, from the classical olive trees of Athens, and his long, equine face with its self-conscious mouth, and beautiful, womanish eyes: *Dorian Gray* speeding across the prairies to bring the gold of culture to the gold-mad multitudes beyond the Missouri River—provided they would pay the dollar admission fee to his lectures. (The miners, lumbermen, and cattlemen could get drunk on “whiskey skins” for less; but it was not every-day that they had the chance to become fuddled with such rare brew as that offered by Wilde.)

Wilde’s Westerners were migrated New Englanders and Southerners who had brought Mrs. Grundy with them in their prairie wagons, along with their guns. You could still shoot a man or two in the West of Wilde’s day without any particularly serious consequences to yourself; but you could not break through the sacred circle that surrounded Mrs. Grundy, the Good Woman and the Genteel Female. And the Good Woman and the Genteel Female, even in the wildest West, stood for the sacredness of Home. If the young English gentleman had something to say about Home, then he was worth listening to, dude or no dude, satin pants or no satin pants.

And the Westerners were accustomed to queer strangers. Like the aborigines of certain countries who have become used to seeing airplanes, but who have never seen much earlier inventions such as the typewriter, or the sewing machine, the Westerners were familiar with the most worldly products of European culture, while the Americans of the Atlantic States who

aped foreign culture they scarcely knew at all. The American West in the '80's was the Africa of wealthy sportsmen from Europe and England, and the American bison, which was still fairly numerous on the plains, was a particularly irresistible attraction for these "hunters." The railroads encouraged them,



"Sport" on the Kansas-Pacific, 1879

and the natives were glad to take their money, but the Indian, to whom the buffalo was food and clothing, added this new grievance to his long black list against the white man.

Anna Dickinson, a young woman from New England who traveled about the country lecturing on "Joan of Arc" and "Woman's Work and Wages," joined the Indians in protest. "Presently I found myself," she writes, in 1879, "as before and since, both amused and disgusted by some English tourists wending their way Westward—the sort of men who know very little at home and do not travel abroad for the purpose of adding to

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their stock of knowledge, landing at New York, looking neither to the right hand nor the left but streaking across lots to the buffalo country for the sole purpose of slaughter." "How many times have I heard the old settlers and hunters anathematize these bloodthirsty fellows," she says, "who are destroying the magnificent creatures by thousands—for nothing save as a gratification to their own gory vanity, killing the grand brutes out of season when their dead bodies cannot be utilized, and in such numbers as certainly cannot be eaten."

The Western towns accustomed to the ways of these "high toners" had long since stopped turning their heads to stare at strange-looking newcomers. Wilde could have walked down the main street of almost any frontier town, even with an actual lily in his "medieval hand," without attracting great attention. Three years before the advent of Wilde in the West, however, a countrywoman of his, who had appeared suddenly in Truckee, a "bad man's town" with saloons open-fronted to the street in true Hollywood fashion, had stirred a ripple of interest with her unusual costume. She wore the "American Lady's Mountain Dress" which she has described as "a half-fitting jacket, a skirt reaching to the ankles, and full Turkish trousers gathered into frills falling over the boots." This dress, which she recommends as being "a thoroughly serviceable and feminine costume for mountaineering and other rough travelling, as in the Alps or any other part of the world," was designed by Isabella Bird, who wore it on horseback over hundreds of miles in the Sierras and the Rocky Mountains. Mounted "cavalier fashion," as she terms it, on a Western bronco, whom she calls "Birdie," fitted with a "silver-bossed Mexican saddle, with ornamental tassels hanging

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from the stirrup guards and a housing of black bears' skin," her carpetbag strapped on behind, her frills flying in the winds, she must have been a figure that even hardened lumbermen would turn to look at. But she has not the slightest fear of them. She is one of that strange band of intrepid women (nearly always British) who have traveled the world since the eighteenth century, who make their tea on top of the Himalayas and in the heart of Africa and on the Siberian steppes;—virginal spirits filled with insatiable curiosity, who invariably win the respect of all kinds of men—to whom they are, perhaps, a kind of relief from the eternal feminine. But even Miss Bird is surprised at the "respectful courtesy" of the Westerner, and she upholds the Fenimore Cooper-Bret Harte legend of the golden-hearted rough diamonds of the West. "Womanly dignity," she says, "and manly respect for women are the salt of society in this wild West." Comanche Bill, whom she encounters on the desolate Denver stage-road, with golden curls hanging down to his waist, a rifle laid across his ornamental saddle, a pair of pistols in the holsters, two revolvers and a knife in his belt, and a carbine slung behind him, treats her like a Mother Superior. While in Estes Park she feels it her "mission" to try to reform her grisly neighbor, "Mountain Jim," a famous Indian scout and one of the most dangerous desperadoes in Colorado: she has him, in the end, weeping like a baby. (Had he come three years sooner, Wilde himself might have been reformed by the pure and delectable Miss Bird!)

Although Wilde did *not* read pages from the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini to the miners of Leadville (this was a brilliant after-thought which made good telling in Mayfair draw-

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ing-rooms) his remarks on the ennobling influence of gold when used as a material for the handicraftsman could have been no less alien to the spirit of his listeners. To millionaires of the Crocker type who had seized upon the opportunities for making money in the West as their inalienable right, as natural as to breathe the cold, thin air of the mountains, and who had contributed their share to the spirit of "hard greed and the exclusive pursuit of gain, with the indifference to all which does not aid in its acquisition"—deplored by Miss Bird—Wilde talked about the need to surround workmen with "happy influences" and beautiful things, and about the bill-boards that desecrated the American scenery. In a land where infuriated, dispossessed savages still struck back at their successors to the canyons and waterfalls and the buffalo, the "young apostle of beauty" told the inhabitants that there should be no flower in their meadows that "does not wreath its tendrils across your pillows, no little leaf in your Titan forests that does not lend its form to design." To a people who were tunneling into the earth, blindly hacking down forests, panting and pushing and falling over each other to destroy everything that stood in the way of riches, Wilde, remembering the doctrine he had learned back at Magdalen, said: "The things of nature do not belong to us. We should leave them to our children as we have received them."

It was a new language; but in the West everything was new. They listened, half mesmerized by the strange sounds and the strange voice. Some of his hearers—particularly the women—felt that there might be something in it, after all. America, in its leisure hours, was always willing to let itself be carried away by a high-sounding word—why not try Estheticism for a while?

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Almost a year after his arrival in America Wilde sailed for England. The lectures, he said, had been a "substantial failure"; and yet American dollars had been paid out to hear him, and his share had not been small. In any case it was enough for him to have a good time on—quite according to precedent—in *Paris*! The sneers and jeers of the American Press followed him to the water's edge; and yet he had given the newspapermen a field day such as they had not had even when Jenny Lind and Lola Montez had been the sensation of the hour. Before boarding Her Majesty's steamship *Bothnia*, Wilde had himself shorn of the poet's long hair. He went home to write a handful of brilliant plays—and probably the duller "Impressions of America" ever published.

The great West has made very little impression upon him; and it seems scarcely worth the tedious journey, "racing along tied to an ugly tea-kettle of an engine." That the Tabernacle of the Mormons is like a "soup-kettle" is the most striking impression he has of the fantastic colony of Latter Day Saints at Salt Lake City; and the experience of going down into a mine in an ore bucket is forever vivid in his memory because it was impossible for him to look "graceful" in such cramped quarters. Of American cities in general he says: "... there is a good deal of beauty to be seen in them now and then, but only where the American has not attempted to create it."

The lecturer on "The English Renaissance" and "Art and the Handicraftsman" and "The Practical Application of the Principles of the Esthetic Theory to Exterior and Interior House Decoration" had no time, it would seem, to look at the work of the Shakers in their Eastern and Western colonies,

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at the work of the German colonies in Pennsylvania, or even to glance at the crafts of the Mormons in Utah. In America, Wilde said, "everybody seems in a hurry to catch a train" . . . *including Wilde!*

Yet the seeds he had sown, although for the purpose of self-publicity, and in the hope of making a great deal of money, blossomed in the cultural desert he had visited. The period of germination was long, but the final flowering was magnificent. "Buffaloes and wild deer are the animals for you," the prophet had said; and the buffalo and the deer appeared at last on satin and leather sofa cushions. The signs that disfigured the countryside were an abomination, he had said, and the Americans had heeded his words; the signs were not done away with, which would have been foolish, but they were now made in an "esthetic" way and were a "decorative" addition to the landscape. "Esthetic" potteries which sprang up over the land used as motifs the native flowers Wilde had advised—the goldenrod, the aster and the rose. Purple lilies and crimson sunflowers adorned "esthetic" draperies and "Japanese" screens, and Whistler's peacock, of which the St. Paul of decoration had told them, became the national bird. Life in America, Wilde said, is "real and improbable."

## LEANING IVORY TOWERS AND STUFFED PEACOCKS

THE MORE materialistic Science becomes, the more angels shall I paint," Burne-Jones said. His statement, in defiance of the Age of Progress, was typical of the followers of Estheticism who had discovered that Nature was a hussy with two faces, and that life was a bad quarter of an hour "made up of exquisite moments." The esthete of the '80's and '90's, finding that his gifts of imagination and emotion were feared and ridiculed by a world bent upon material success, hung a label about the enemy's neck—every one who did not see eye to eye with the esthete was a "Philistine"—and climbed into his ivory tower where he communed only with the angels and the stars. The artist's slogan was Cousin's "Art for Art's Sake," and, in the spirit of Vanderbilt (but not from the same motives!) he declared "The Public be damned."

Pater also expressed his defiance of the Machine Age. The work of poets, he said, "is not to teach lessons, or enforce morals, or even to stimulate us to noble ends, but to withhold the thoughts for awhile from the mere machinery of life, to fix them . . . on the aspects of those great facts of man's existence which no machinery affects." Mrs. Grundy, barricaded in the sanctity of the home, and the artist, in his retreat from "the machinery of life"—where he proposed to create by immaculate





### Imagination unleashed

*Top:* "Moorish-Eastlake" room in a New York house in the eighties. Artists wanted to paint it for posterity. *Bottom:* "Henry IV" dining-room in the Cleveland era. The chandelier was the owner's pride. At night the colored glass behind the filigree-work shone with jewel-like effect

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conception—were, after their long battle, in virtual agreement at last. To them both, everyday life was a horror to be fled from and denied. "Better to take pleasure in a rose," Wilde said, "than to put its root under a microscope."

As a result of the esthetic consciousness the American home was now not only the shelter of the Genteel Female (who was finding new and daring ways of getting out of it) and the temple of holy matrimony, but was also the House Beautiful, the Home Artistic, and even the House Dignified. The peacock, as a symbol of beauty, became a favorite ornament. The entire bird appeared, sometimes two or more in the same room, a triumph of the taxidermist's art that was perched, with the long, magnificent tail hanging down, on mantel- or book-shelves. If the stuffed bird were not obtainable, peacock feathers could always be bought (Fourteenth Street in New York during the '80's and '90's was lined with shops that did a good business in peacock feathers) and these were used as decoration in all sorts of fetching ways—placed in Sèvres or majolica vases, draped over picture and mirror frames, or arranged in an artful fashion on top of the silk drapery on the piano.

The peacock motif was also popular at the time for wall decoration, carpets and textiles. A New York house in the '80's had a frescoed frieze in solid gold in a design which appeared to a contemporary writer "as if several peacock feathers had been tossed up and had stuck there." A bedroom in this house had a ceiling decoration of overlapping Japanese fans; but even the peacock frieze and the fan-ceiling were overshadowed by the Moorish library with its horseshoe arches in what might be termed Moorish-Eastlake style, its sumptuous drap-

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eries that had belonged to the wedding finery of an Arabian bride, and furnishings specially made in the Orient for the owners. This room, which many American artists itched to paint in order to pass its great beauty on to posterity, had a ceiling fresco which represented "stars shining through dark clouds at night."

The self-assurance of American decorators in the latter part of the century was expressed all down the line from the professional in touch with England and the Continent, to the "artistic" amateur at home. There was an admirable keenness for novel associations of objects, for complicated color schemes, for richness and variety of effect that produced interiors of such pronounced originality it is doubtful if their like had ever been seen before, or if a later generation, even with the will, could repeat them.

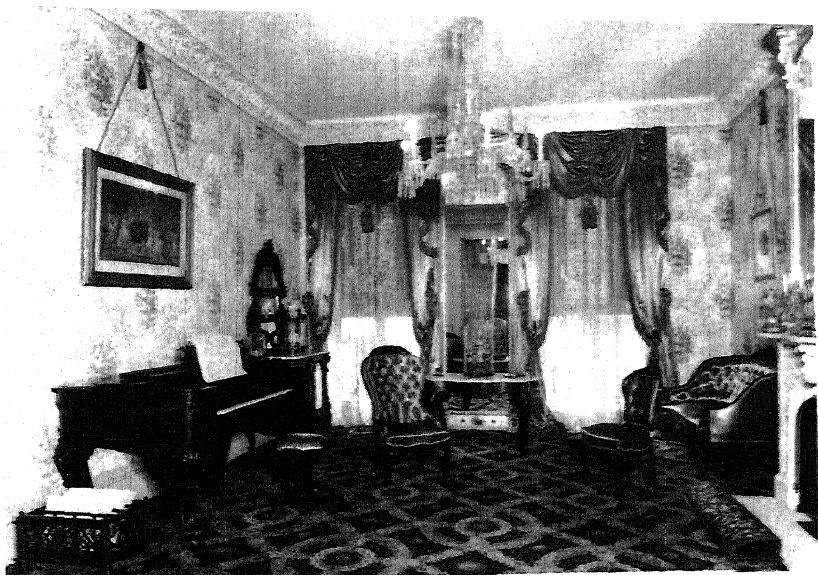
Incredible sums of money were spent upon houses that in any other age and country would have been assured their eventual place in the company of venerable buildings, but which were doomed to be destroyed by following generations that had no use for them. Among the many houses of this type there was the spectacularly magnificent house of A. T. Stewart, the "merchant prince" which stood on Fifth Avenue at Thirty-Fourth Street. With its first and second floors entirely of Carrara marble, its ceilings over eighteen feet high, its murals painted by an Italian artist (completely forgotten today), its marble staircases, its rosewood and gilt onyx-topped furniture, its crimson plush hangings edged with gilt appliqué, and its numerous rooms—almost every one of them "big enough for a party"—it was the dream and the goal of all striving shopkeepers on Union

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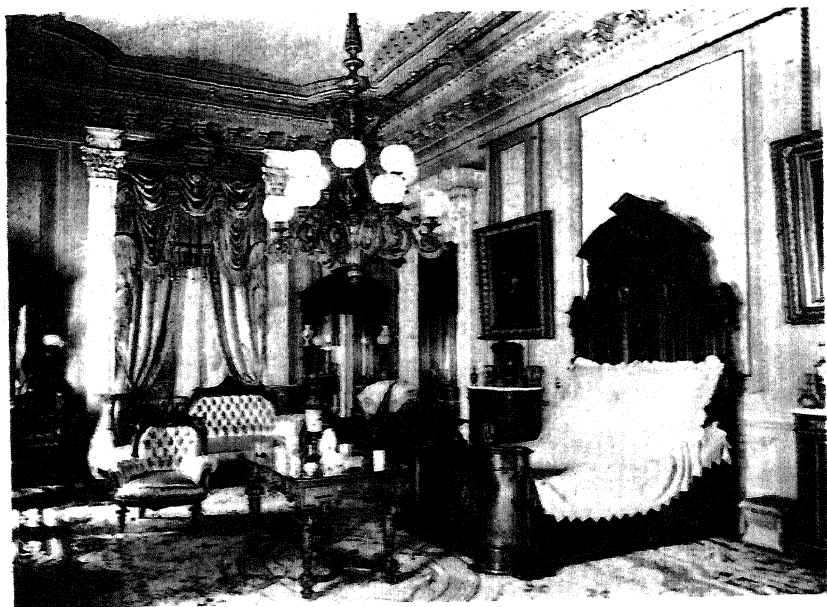
Square and Broadway. Here was "General Grant's room" with its twin beds, both *full size*, and its great wardrobes with "concealed lavatory apparatus." And here was the famous Stewart art collection with its life-sized Bouguereaus, its Tantardinis, Vernets, Bierstadts, Churches, Eastman Johnsons and Munkácsys, and Randolph Rogers' Victorian masterpiece *The Blind Girl of Pompeii*, Torte's *Communist Woman* ("looking scornfully about her") and the inevitable *Greek Slave* by Powers.

The early Victorian what-not was among the first things to go when estheticism dictated reform in decoration, and the "memorabilia," kickshaws and fantasies it had displayed were now placed on table-tops, mantel shelves and especially on the "plate" rail that became the correct place for bric-a-brac in the late '90's. The Venus de Milo lost her solitary dignity in the '80's and was now frequently seen with Barye's *Lion* or accompanied by other replicas of the antique fashioned in ivory-toned plaster. (An exceedingly artistic mantel arrangement was that in which a plaster bas-relief from the antique was hung against a background of silk figured material in the place above the hearth usually filled by a mirror.) In the American "den" the Venus might find herself with Chief-Rain-in-the-Face, the baskets made by his squaws, and the wampum for which he had no further use, as well as a copper chafing dish surrounded by majolica beer steins made in Germany.

In rooms paneled in American oak and with red-leather wall covering studded in brass nail-heads, there were to be seen complete suits of armor, many of them manufactured in America for knights whose ancestors' only experiences on the tilting



*Courtesy, Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association*



### Victorian, chaste and not so chaste

*Top:* Parlor in the birthplace of Theodore Roosevelt. With its hand-carved furniture and demure grace it is a good example of early Victorian. *Bottom:* Bedroom in the home of A. T. Stewart, typical of "the best that money can buy"

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fields had been that of caddying for the jousting lords. The early Victorian white marble statues of *Purity*, *The Seasons* and *The Song of the Shirt* had given place to bronze replicas, heavily patined in chocolate brown, of *Mercury*, the *Arab Chieftain* (by various obscure French sculptors), and the *Victory* from the Castel St. Angelo in Rome. These sculptures appeared in rooms decked with stuffed moose and deer heads (in one house there were thirty-three antlered heads) and stuffed bears standing on their hind legs with arms outstretched.

Animal skins, on the floor and "thrown" over chairs and sofas, were a popular fin-de-siècle fashion—perhaps an imitation of Wilde who had carried a number of pelts about with him to create an atmosphere of barbaric voluptuousness in the chaste hideousness of American hotels.

The fashion for objects made by the Japanese had developed a taste for Oriental things that included those of the Near East; and to the Japanese screens, fans, and gongs, had been added the colored tiles, the horseshoe arches and mussarabi lattice-work (often combined with colored glass!) of Asia Minor. The Turkish tabouret was a legacy from this fashion which endured for many years; sometimes an original with its inlay, but more often a jig-saw or painted adaptation, it was an indispensable article in the American home, serving as a tea table, or as a stand for the universal potted palm, fern, or rubber plant.

Oriental too was the bamboo portière which may also have been introduced by Wilde—who would have seen it at its most glamorous in Sarah Bernhardt's house in Paris. (Wilde said

on one occasion that the three greatest women of the age were Sarah Bernhardt, Lily Langtry, and Queen Victoria. He would, he added, be glad to marry any one of them.) Whether he spoke of it in America or not, the bamboo portière undoubtedly would have appealed to Wilde's instinctive taste when free from the dogma of Pre-Raphaelitism. The bamboo portière was a rustling, rattling object made of bamboo reeds hanging vertically and interspersed with colored glass beads. With spear-pointed palms banked about her doorways, her floors and couches strewn with the skins of leopards and tigers, the *Camille* and *Phèdre* of Parisian idolatry would part the portières impressively and spring forward like a tigress from the jungle to send shivers of terrified fascination down the spines of her masculine visitors. American women somehow got hold of the idea and liked it, and bamboo portières hung at innumerable doors in the bicycle era where they helped Main Street *élégantes* to make effective, if scarcely tigerish, entrances.

Along with the exotic atmosphere favored in the late '80's and in the '90's, there was also a tendency to express in house decoration the "return to Nature and Life" which Wilde had said was "driving Art into the wilderness." Humble, familiar objects were brought into the home and transformed into things of beauty. The milking stool appeared on the rich pile carpets, the chemist's mortar and pestle were gilded and placed on shelves as ornaments, and the fisherman's net—its sturdy, craftsman's quality had been appreciated by an artist who had hung it in his studio without suspecting he was creating a fashion—became a symbol of the artistic spirit, almost as irresistible as the Japanese fan and the peacock. The net

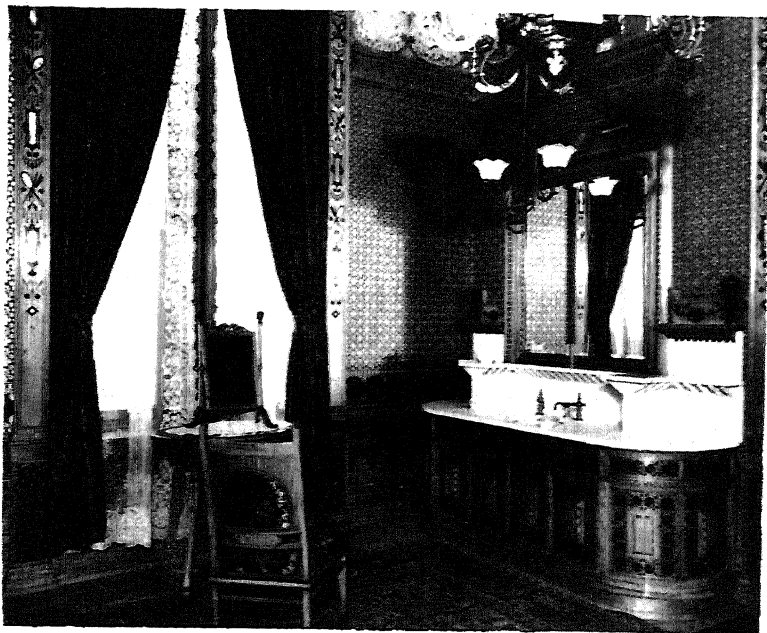
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complete with cork floats and whatever dead sea-life could be obtained, hung festooned from the ceiling, like an enormous spider web, over pianos, doorways and sofas; it was even draped beneath the chandeliers.

One of the most unusual forms of late nineteenth-century decoration, and one which negated the fantastic qualities of all the others, was the cosy-corner. Whatever or whoever inspired it—whether it was Sarah Bernhardt again who was responsible, or whether it was the sights on the “midway plaisance” of the Chicago World’s Fair—it swept the country like another Gold Rush fever. There were two kinds of cosy-corner—the academic and the ingenious. The first was an attempted reproduction of the tent of a powerful Arab Sheik, composed of genuine fabrics from Asia Minor, and complete with crossed scimitars and daggers, ornamental shields and a hanging mosque lamp. Here, on her “at home” days the American hostess of the Cleveland era, resplendent in her square-cut décolleté evening gown with its stiff train (she dressed in full evening dress for her afternoon parties!) might pose effectively for a few moments while she discussed Ellen Terry’s *Portia* and Mme Modjeska’s *Camille* with her lion of the hour (very likely a French or English writer who would not be listening, but who would be instead busily counting her diamonds and the number of orchids in the room for a lively paragraph in his forthcoming “Impressions of America”). There was also the humbler, but no less dramatic, cosy-corner created with amateur enthusiasm from Roman blankets, Bagdad stuffs, East Indian turban cloths and Japanese printed cottons; with a canopied couch and pillows covered with one



or more of these fabrics it was a simple matter to achieve the lure of the Orient by adding a large Japanese parasol (opened under the canopy) Japanese fans and lanterns, a Turkish tabouret and a Damascus sword or two.



*Courtesy, The Museum of the City of New York*

### John D. Rockefeller's dressing room

Elaborate inlay decorates the woodwork in both the dressing room and bedroom from Rockefeller's house which are installed in the Museum of the City of New York

An "Oriental" couch—not quite a cosy-corner—was also placed on stair landings, a part of a group completed by a potted plant or palm on a wrought-iron stand, and a "standing" lamp with a parasol shade. Besides the cosy-corner and the couch on the landing, the house of the late '90's was usually

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equipped by the architect himself with a window seat which had a stuffed covering and which was, like the cosy-corner, made comfortable, in appearance, at least, with many cushions.

In spite of sterility in matters of design, and in spite of a complete lack of understanding of the basic rules of construction, the house of the well-to-do American of the late nineteenth century, with its strangely original factory-made furniture forms that were innocent of ancestors (and, one hopes, of descendants) was a more convenient place in which to live than the earlier Victorian house had been. In nearly every house of this classification there was a bathroom (with walls handsomely paneled in wood) and gas—for lighting only. (A New York house of the '80's, owned by a man of wealth, had electricity for lighting the gas!) Although several houses in the late '80's were already equipped with telephones, foreigners were more impressed by the efficient-looking array of push-buttons on a brass plate in the hall of city houses; these bells summoned, respectively, a one-horse cab, a two-horse cab (two rings!), a messenger, a policeman, and "the fire-brigade with engine, fire-escape, and the rest of their life-saving apparatus."

The World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 belonged to the architects. Unquestionably, it was their fair. After the long years of Victorian experiment, here at last was a return to the sound and reasoned order of ancient Greece and Rome. Here the Victorian irreconcilables, Life, Nature and Art, were nobly met. American public structures, banks, office buildings and city houses from this time on would reveal the

influence of these creations in the "White City" which, although they were mere façades and built of unenduring "staff," represented a great labor of love on the part of American architects dreaming back to a lofty antiquity safe and secure from the machine. (But modern metal construction—already developing the "elevator building"—formed the real framework of the building behind many of these scholarly architectural fronts.)

The buildings were given a beautiful background designed by the brilliant Frederick L. Olmsted and his assistant, H. S. Codman, who had transformed Jackson Park on the shores of Lake Michigan into a New World Venice. At night, illumined by the many bright arc lights, their stately porticoes reflected in the long lagoons on which Venetian gondolas were guided by gondoliers who filled the air with genuine *Sole Mio's*, they formed a city of magic and enchantment with intimations of a world of heroic rhythms, like that created by the Alexandrines of Corneille in which even the lowest mortal spoke in the language of the gods.

Once past these Olympian—if ephemeral—fronts there was an abrupt return to nineteenth-century prose. On all sides there was striking evidence of the fact that the other arts lagged behind architecture. With a few exceptions, the exhibition presented the same conglomeration of works produced by capable mediocrities that had been typical of all large international industrial expositions since the London Crystal Palace.

New machines and inventions were exhibited—the phonograph was one of the newest—as well as their early prototypes.

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Stephenson's steam engine, that was still a wonder in 1851, was already a funny, quaint affair to the men in the bowler hats with narrow curled brims, in buttoned shoes, and with jewelled stickpins in their foulard cravats, who walked about the "White City" with their ladies, in their full, floor-length skirts, high, stiff hats, and wide leg-o'-mutton sleeves.

There were exhibits of over-stuffed walnut, oak, rosewood and mahogany furniture with squat, porcine shapes, covered with satin and brocade—puffed, quilted and pleated—and so bloated-looking that it would seem as if a pin prick in the center would collapse the whole affair. There were row upon row of "modern" lamps, standing and table lamps, on stamped brass, and gilded iron supports, some of them with semi-detached bronze sculptures in the round—statuesque maidens who supported the lamp with one slim hand, or bold knights in coats of mail, who grasped the lamp standard with a strong, conqueror's grip. All had parasol shades intricately made like the women's evening dresses, of sheer material over pleated, colored silk linings, and decorated with artificial flowers, ruffles, colored lace, and swags and bows of ribbon.

There were metal beds of molded brass and cast-iron with elaborate grillwork head- and foot-boards, some of them with canopies *à l'ange*. There were water colors and needlework from Queen Victoria's own hand; iridescent wallpapers, and a thirty-foot model of the Brooklyn Bridge made entirely of soap.

There was the Woman's Building, designed by a woman architect, and filled with arts and crafts created by women, and in which there was Mrs. Potter Palmer's room with its novel

and exceedingly "advanced" exhibit of furniture—all of it made in America in the time of Queen Anne.

There were displays of Tiffany stained glass, "cut" glass from Libbey, of Toledo, Ohio, and the successful Cincinnati Rookwood pottery that was essential in the creation of an esthetic, Pre-Raphaelite atmosphere. And there was the "mid-way plaisance" with its Arabian pavilion and its Turkish village, in both of which the bowlers and the leg-o'-muttons flaired a delicious sinfulness which was to do much towards making the '90's "gay."

There was the usual expertly fashioned china and pottery from England, and the correct, cold, uninspired factory-made English furniture; the inevitable Gobelins and Beauvais tapestry from France, and French "artistic" furniture in the Louis styles, including a "sedan-chair" cabinet; ceramics and textiles from Japan—and Japanese furniture in the Anglo-Japanese style that curiously foreshadowed certain forms produced by designers of the twentieth-century "modern" school.

But four hundred years before, Columbus had discovered America; the fair which celebrated this event was held in a city that had not been in existence sixty years back—and twenty of these had been years of rebirth after a devastating fire. Against the superb mastery that was evident in every tone of the Gobelins and Beauvais tapestries, the sophisticated ease and grace of the Louis furniture forms, the solid, self-assured craftsmanship of English artisans, and the artful line achieved by the Orientals, America could set the wonderful facts of her existence: let the doubter listen a moment to the song of the Venetian gondolier: *Sole Mio* from a gondola on a canal—

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in the prairies!—where not so very long before the Indian had howled his war cries from the back of his piebald horse.

The furniture and decorative objects exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair offered complete demonstration of the fact that the Victorian styles had reached their height, that one Baroque conceit more, one additional curve, one more roll of wadding in over-stuffed pieces, and the public itself would reach the saturation point and protest. In France, the reaction had already come; here designers were launched on a venture into new forms with an eye to new conditions to be developed in the coming century. The furniture of the Nouveau Art movement was an exaggerated, but well-proportioned adaptation of Queen Anne and Louis XV forms with a tendency towards looseness in structure and over-delicacy in profiles that was apt to produce an effect of weakness and flimsiness. Ornamental elements were composed of a combination of wavy stem- and vine-forms with stylized flowers, often roses and tulips, formally rounded or arrowhead in shape. The riotous Victorian color arrangements were replaced by cool, soft colors in woodwork, textiles and rugs. Interior designs were created as units with a basic pattern informing the various parts, several of them often joined together. The movement developed a genuine, cumulative style that embraced decoration in all its branches, and which eventually spread to architecture.

The Nouveau Art style was slow to take hold in America, where it was never generally adopted. This country had, besides, its own new style, the sturdy, so-called Mission which,

with its prominent use of native woods, its rugged simplicity and conservatism, was well suited to average American life.

Real Mission was one of the few genuinely indigenous American styles. A year after the opening of the Chicago World's Fair a single chair was sent from California to Joseph P. McHugh in New York. From this piece, created in a Spanish mission, McHugh developed with the aid of an expert designer, J. H. Dudley, furniture with the members made by hand from large, single pieces of ash or oak with exposed tenons and dowels, and with seats of rushes, haircloth or leather. This furniture was uncompromisingly rectilinear, rustic, heavy and austere, but it was sound and appealed to average Americans whose taste was apt to be—when uninfluenced by fashion—basically masculine and “tailor-made.”

The Arts and Crafts movement which had flowed in from England, and which bore the influence of William Morris and his followers, absorbed the Mission style into itself, producing variations that were labeled “Craftsman” and “Cottage” furniture. In most of this furniture—some of the most successful was made by Gustave Stickley—an attempt was made to lighten the severe forms of the genuine Mission with modest curves, while an attractive so-called “Mission” style was developed in native ash which resembled the popular willow furniture. (A “Mission” type was the famous American “Morris” chair which it was the English designer's bad luck to have named after him and from which, undoubtedly, he would have run in horror.)

Towards the end of the last decade of the nineteenth century a Mission type of furniture was also manufactured in the Roy-

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croft Shops at East Aurora, New York. This community was one of the many organized in nineteenth-century America in which the dignity was to be returned to labor of which it had been deprived by the machine. Elbert Hubbard—he called himself “Fra Elbertus”—was the ruling spirit behind the venture which was modeled upon the teachings of William Morris, particularly Morris’ slogan, “Useful work *versus* useless toil.” Besides making furniture, the Roycrofters operated a press for the production of “artistic” books—most of them from the pen of Fra Elbertus. They also published a periodical called *The Philistine*; and it, too, was filled with the writings of the community’s leader.

Hubbard, in advance of his time with his simple furniture, was also ahead of the age in his “Little Journeys” which popularized art by avoiding all tedious and unprofitable esthetic analysis; interest was focused upon the personalities of the artists themselves in such a breezy, informal manner that the hostility felt for genius was swept away with the mystery that surrounds it, and in the “Little Journeys” the world’s greatest artists stood revealed as friendly and as “folksy” as one’s next-door neighbor. Hubbard’s furniture, based on good English models, was better than his prose—which was not. But, unfortunately for the average American whose surroundings were most in need of them, Roycroft “Mission” products were far too expensive for him to buy. “Let your walls be brown” Wilde had said in America. Now, some fifteen years later, his words were obeyed, and brown became the theme-color for the interior in “Mission” style. The Mission furniture was stained a light brown, and the leather that covered its seats was brown;



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hanging at the windows were brown curtains with stenciled patterns in Nouveau Art style, usually in lighter tones of brown, with yellow accents. Brown was the color for objects of art, lamp shades and sofa cushions. And the marquetry patterns on the floor were in tones of brown. On the walls hung picture-frames of brown-stained wood containing reproductions (also in brown) of the work of the Pre-Raphaelites: Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* and *Sir Galahad*, Rossetti's *Blessed Damozel* and his *Mrs. Morris*. George Frederick Watts' *Hope* would also be found in the "Mission" room, with Sir Frederick Leighton's *Summer Moon*, and unfailingly, everywhere that estheticism had penetrated, there was Whistler's "Mother."

Queen Victoria, now "Granny" to half the royalty in Europe, lived out the century, still underlining her words, still looking upon the world as an English garden occasionally threatened by alien weeds—still thinking of Albert. Dutiful to the last, she saw her country to its first milestone in the new century before she decided that at last her work was done. Her going, it was felt, "seemed to clear the air."



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